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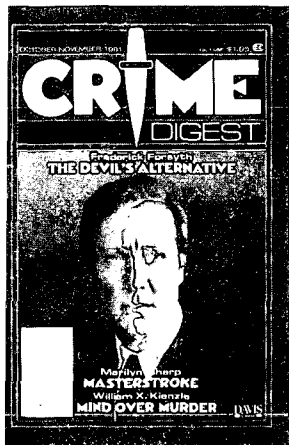
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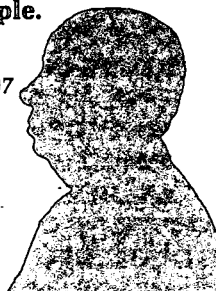
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August 19, 1981

Dear Reader:

How do you approach each new issue of *AHMM*? Do you scan the contents page? Do you skim the issue itself, looking for an author whose stories you especially enjoy and start there? Or do you leaf through the issue hoping an illustration will give you a clue where to begin? Do you look for Alfred Hitch-

cock's once-an-issue cameo performance? Or do you start on the first page and enjoy as you go?

If you use the last method, we do try to vary the stories for your maximum enjoyment—but whatever your strategy, we think you'll enjoy the diverse settings (Shanghai, 1925, and New York City, 2014, for instance) in this new issue. If you're a contents-page scanner, incidentally, don't jump to the conclusion that we've included two racetrack stories. One of the tracks in the titles refers to those made by the record industry, not by horses.

Good reading.

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Rykker VanDort was the world's master forger . . .



Amos Bascombe was elected Managing Director of the Shanghai Merchants Bank in March 1925. He was the thirteenth man to hold that post. His appointment came on the thirteenth day of the month. The chance coincidence of numbers amused him at the time.

A week later he was no longer amused.

Since the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, China had moved from crisis to turmoil. Political feuding in the south combined with petty warlords in

the north were building events toward another crisis. Amos Bascombe was prepared for this. He was not prepared for Mr. Catley.

After listening to Mr. Catley's words and examining the evidence, he swore the man to silence. A suitably frightened Mr. Catley returned to his desk.

For the first time in his career, Amos Bascombe felt a twinge of panic. The problem was now his. Sooner or later the Board of Directors would have to be told. He needed time. He needed help. There was the matter of proof. What if both he and Catley were being deceived by the evidence? After all, they were not experts in this particular field. The hiring of recognized experts was out of the question. One hint of this on the street and the rumor mills would grind the Shanghai Merchants Bank into the pages of history's failures.

Mr. Bascombe was fifty-five, frock-coated, and feisty. Among members of the business community he was viewed as a competent, careful man of conservative mind. They trusted him. That trust would have been called into question had they known the secret root of his success. He was quietly unconventional.

So was the problem. His response was to send a telegram to another unconventional man. The man was David Feng.

David Feng's life had been uncommon almost from the moment of his birth. His parents had been massacred with the others in a small Chinese village during the Boxer Rebellion. A childless American missionary couple had taken him from the arms of his dying mother and raised him as their own. He grew up speaking the dialects of China and the English of midwestern America. By the time he went to college David was taller and heavier than the average Chinese. Amos Bascombe, who had spent nearly twenty years in China, rightly concluded that David Feng's natural parents had been of Tientsin Mohammedan stock, many of whom were well over six feet and powerfully built.

Amos Bascombe felt he had made a wise decision. David Feng sensed the banker's confidence in his handshake when he was shown into the Managing Director's private office.

"I regret I couldn't be more specific in my telegram, Mr. Feng, but if you will step over here to the window table you will see why."

A sheaf of documents, weighted down with a large magnifying glass was in the center of an otherwise bare walnut table. David moved the lens aside and leafed through the heavy oblong sheets one by one. He counted

twenty-five Chinese Government Development Bonds. Each had a face value of one hundred English pounds.

They were quality bonds, backed by gold, and their workmanship was beautiful. David turned them face down to examine the backs. Five were covered with small red and blue dots. The remaining twenty were blank.

He looked across the table at Mr. Bascombe. "I assume there is an explanation for the dots."

"There is indeed, Mr. Feng. The back of each valid bond was secretly imprinted with a chemical. Under normal conditions the dots are invisible, but they can be made to appear with the application of heat. The process is non-reversible. It is an experimental method for validating their authenticity should a bond appear—shall we say—questionable."

"Has that ever happened?"

"Never. We would not have found these except by the purest of chance. Mr. Catley is in charge of our bond department. On the Friday after I received my appointment, Mr. Catley left these bonds on his desk near the window beneath a cut-crystal paperweight. It was a sunny day. So were Saturday and Sunday. You can imagine Mr. Catley's surprise when he returned to his desk on Monday morning to find that some of the bonds had broken out in a circle of spots in precisely the same shape as his crystal paperweight. The cause was obvious. Over the weekend, the crystal had focused sufficient heat from the sunlight to activate the chemicals. But only on five of the bonds."

"Were those five on top of the stack?"

Mr. Bascombe shook his head. "They were intermingled with the others. That was what aroused Mr. Catley's suspicion. He subjected all twenty-five bonds to uniform heat. Twenty remained blank. The remaining five developed a full field of dots."

David put the bonds in a neat pile beneath the magnifying glass. He looked at Amos Bascombe. There was a faint hint of pathetic eagerness on the man's face. After a few moments of thought David said to him, "The absence of dots is not conclusive proof that we are dealing with counterfeit bonds. There is a possibility that the chemicals were never applied."

"My thoughts exactly! When you called from the hotel this morning you said there is a man who is highly skilled at detecting forgeries. Can you find him?"

David shifted uneasily in his chair. His momentary discomfort was not

lost on Mr. Bascombe. "I have given you *carte blanche* in this matter, Mr. Feng. I repeat, can you find him?"

Looking directly at Amos Bascombe, David said, "The best man for this job would be Sean Demaree, but you may not want him. He spent three years in Dartmoor Prison for forgery. At the present time he owns a small print-shop and occasionally deals in rare prints—most of which are authentic."

Amos Bascombe laughed so hard his pince-nez bounced at the end of its black ribbon. "Can you find him?" he repeated again.

"Easily enough," David replied. "He's the small nervous gentleman waiting in your outer office." He stood up, hesitated a moment, and added, "Don't expect any conversation from him, Mr. Bascombe. He's a mute. A throat injury during a prison riot cost him his voice."

Sean Demaree looked carefully around the room before tentatively shaking hands with the banker, then put his long thin hands into his coat pockets to hide the traces of printer's ink beneath his nails. The oversized white suit he was wearing smelled faintly of mothballs and gin. In response to his inquiring glance, David pointed to the window table. Demaree, one shoelace untied, scuttled toward the stack of bonds.

"He will need a ruled tablet and a fountain pen," David told Mr. Bascombe.

After satisfying himself about the quality of the paper and the water-marks, Demaree examined the backs of the bonds. The blue and red dots brought a slight smile to his face that caused Mr. Bascombe a moment of consternation. Removing his coat, Demaree tied his shoelace, then selected two bonds—one with colored dots and one blank. These he subjected to a point-by-point comparison beneath the powerful magnifying lens. For thirty minutes, his shyness vanishing, he studied, reflected, scribbled notes, and emitted random grunts and sighs. At one point a fleeting look of sadness crossed his face. The look puzzled David, but he hesitated to interrupt.

The results covered several sheets of paper. David Feng turned his chair toward Mr. Bascombe.

"Some of this report is highly technical," he said, leafing through the pages, "but there are two main points. First, the twenty bond certificates without the colored dots are definitely counterfeit. The evidence is con-

clusive. Second, Mr. Demaree has identified the counterfeiter. His name is Rykker VanDort."

Amos Bascombe sat down with the abruptness of a man who suddenly finds himself with an armful of anvils. "Oh, my God!" Both hands trembled as he adjusted the pince-nez on the bridge of his nose. He turned his face toward Sean Demaree, who seemed to be standing a little taller than before. He was holding up one finger and nodding.

David was startled. "Who is this VanDort?"

"As Mr. Demaree's finger so eloquently states," Bascombe replied, "Rykker VanDort is number one. Have you ever heard of the French bond scandal of 'ninety-eight? No, that was before your time."

Sean Demaree edged his chair closer to David's.

"In 1898," Bascombe said, "the French government prepared an issue of bonds worth many millions of francs. A few days prior to the announced date for the sale to begin, the French police received an anonymous tip. They raided a farmhouse near Dijon. In it they found two men with a printing apparatus and enough counterfeit bonds of the pending issue to bankrupt the French economy. It caused quite a stir. Shortly thereafter, a third man was arrested in Paris. During the trial one of the counterfeiters committed suicide in his cell. Of the two remaining defendants, one was sentenced to five years at hard labor in a French prison. The other man—God pity him—received twenty years on Devil's Island. A fourth man was mentioned during the trial, but he was never charged. His name was Rykker VanDort."

"A man of VanDort's skill must have tried again," David suggested.

"The French police were of the same opinion, Mr. Feng," Bascombe said. "They have kept an eye on his movements as best they could over the years. He popped up in Brazil two years later. The foreign-exchange banks there nearly drowned in a flood of counterfeit Canadian dollars.

"The French police linked him to the collapse of silver-mining shares on the London Stock Exchange in 1913, but again proof was lacking. After that incident his career becomes a bit foggy. Every time a sensational case of counterfeiting occurs the newspapers are quick to credit it to Rykker VanDort. Most of the stories are patently ridiculous. What we have here is not. Our bank has been making heavy purchases of these bonds for some of our biggest clients."

"Mr. Demaree has identified twenty bonds as counterfeit," David said. "There could be more."

"Many more," Bascombe agreed with a shudder. "The Shanghai Merchants Bank could be facing ruin. There are, of course, certain immediate steps to be taken. I will suspend all further purchases of these bonds and order Mr. Catley to check the authenticity of those remaining in our vault. The rest is up to you, Mr. Feng. What do you propose?"

David reached for Sean's written report. Something about it was gnawing at the back of his mind. "If the French are still keeping tabs on VanDort, you might see if Inspector DuBois in the French Settlement here in Shanghai knows anything."

Amos Bascombe came alive again. "I'll make the call immediately. If you gentlemen will excuse me a moment?"

He was opening the office door when David called after him, "Ask for information on the other counterfeiters involved in the 1898 job," then turned his attention again to Sean's written report.

He leafed through it carefully, reading the familiar lines. Familiar? Too damned familiar! He scowled at Sean Demaree, who blushed and tried to look sheepish.

David tossed the report on the table and stood up. "That's *my* handwriting, you misbegotten pile of Irish linen!"

Sean Demaree collided with Amos Bascombe as the latter entered the room. "Oh! Are you leaving so soon, Mr. Demaree?" A rapidly bobbing head was his only reply as Sean vanished through the outer office.

"Strange little fellow," Bascombe remarked.

"I believe he was late for an appointment," observed David. "Did you get through to Inspector DuBois?"

Amos Bascombe came as close to glowing as his profession permitted. "We're in luck! Rykker VanDort has been in Shanghai since January. He's staying at the Hotel Cathay." He handed David a folded sheet of note-paper. "Here is his description."

The desk clerk at the Hotel Cathay glanced at the lobby wall clock and said to David, "You might try the Chanticleer, sir. He usually has lunch there about this time."

The Chanticleer was an imposing French restaurant four blocks from the hotel. David took time in the foyer to adjust his necktie and help himself to a boutonniere from a bowl of flowers. His plan formed, he strode up to the headwaiter. With his boutonniere at the headwaiter's

eye level, he announced himself haughtily as "Mynheer VanDort's interpreter and private secretary."

He found his man seated alone at a table near the back wall. Elaborately carved wooden screens separated the table from the main dining area. From where he stood, he could see Rykker VanDort's puffy face and part of his right side. A large helping of food was speared on the fork resting in his hand beside a silver platter on the table. An emaciated waiter with a chocolate-brown face above a short white jacket was refilling VanDort's wineglass from a napkin-wrapped bottle. The waiter corked the bottle, picked up the wineglass, and, as David watched, leaned close to VanDort and said something to him. VanDort did not respond. The waiter set the glass on the table, adjusted the napkin draped over his left arm, and walked back toward the kitchen.

David now had a clear view of VanDort. Inspector DuBois had accurately described him as a large man with white hair, rapidly going to fat, clean shaven, and wearing glasses. David approached the table. He planned to introduce himself as an interpreter seeking employment with a European gentleman.

His carefully rehearsed speech emerged as a quietly said "Well, I'll be damned!" Behind the thick glass lenses on Rykker VanDort's face were the eyes of a dead man.

David quickly recovered himself, took out the piece of notepaper containing VanDort's description, and sat down beside the corpse. To any casual observer, the two men at the table would appear to be discussing business over lunch. David leaned in closer. His left hand felt the firm elliptical outline of a hotel-key holder. He slipped his hand into the side pocket of Rykker's suit coat to palm the key. The key, placed between the folds of the note, disappeared into his own suit pocket.

In the foyer, a flower bowl reclaimed the borrowed boutonniere.

With a slap and twang of dangling cables, the cage elevator wheezed to a stop at the fifth floor. Its metal grille gate slid open. A tall Chinese waiter carrying a whiskey-and-soda carefully centered on a serving tray emerged and walked sedately down the carpeted hallway to Room 501 of the Hotel Cathay. He let himself in with a key, closed the door, and locked it from inside.

David Feng placed the tray on the nightstand beside the bed and gratefully consumed the contents of the glass, then started his search with

the bathroom. It was small, tidy, and bare. If Rykker VanDort had hidden the plate for the counterfeit bonds in his room, David knew he must find them before the police arrived. He returned to the bedroom.

The Chinese Government Development Bonds were about seven inches wide and ten inches long. The engraved metal plate would be somewhat larger. There were few places in the room where it could be hidden. He went to the mirrored chiffonier and searched through the drawers, feeling beneath each one for anything taped to the bottom. The two top drawers contained socks, silk handkerchiefs, and a leather box of studs and cufflinks. Shirts and underwear filled the bottom drawers.

A wall closet held several expensive suits and pairs of shoes. The two suitcases on the floor were empty. He opened the drawer of the nightstand. Beneath a staghorn cigar-nipper he found a passport with the embossed markings of the Republic of Argentina. He opened it to the first page. It certified that Carlos Luis Hernandez was a citizen of Argentina traveling on business. Attached to the same page was a photograph of Señor Hernandez. He had white hair above a puffy face and wore thick glasses.

David slipped the passport into his pocket, felt underneath the bottom of the drawer, closed it, then knelt down beside the bed. There was barely enough clearance between it and the floor to accept his forearm. He withdrew his arm and stretched out flat on his stomach. With his shoulder jammed against the edge of the frame, he ran his hand up between the bedsprings. His sleeve caught on a jagged wire.

A key rattled in the door. David twisted his head around and stared at the lock. He watched in horror as the key he'd left in it jiggled, bobbed up and down a few times, and fell to the floor.

He yanked his arm back. It disappeared into the snagged sleeve of his waiter's jacket, leaving him more helpless than before. He lunged back and up. The serving tray and glass crashed from the nightstand to the floor. He rushed across the room, picked up the key, frantically worked it into the lock, and flung open the door. Stepping out into the hallway he saw the emaciated-looking little man with the chocolate-brown face darting down the stairway beyond the elevator shaft.

David heard the elevator gate slide open. A mob of European tourists loaded down with cameras and packages of souvenirs suddenly filled the hallway. He quickly stepped back through the door.

When the last sounds of the tourists faded away behind closed doors, David Feng took the stairway to the basement laundry room where he reclaimed his suit coat from beneath a sheet in a laundry basket, dropped his waiter's jacket onto a pile of dirty clothes, and took the service entrance to the alley.

As he turned in the direction of the Chanticleer, his mind returned to the frightened chocolate-brown face of the little Hindu fleeing down the stairway. Was the man a thief as well as a waiter? Not too likely, considering that he appeared to have a key to Rykker VanDort's room. Had Rykker hired the little man to be his confederate in disposing of the counterfeit bonds? That was possible. He was a waiter in an expensive French restaurant frequented by rich Europeans. Who would ever suspect a pathetic half-starved little Hindu waiter to be acting as a go-between involved in high finance?

David approached the Chanticleer along the other side of the street. Things appeared normal. By now Rykker VanDort's body had been taken to the police morgue. He circled around the block. The street behind the restaurant was lined with small shops. Halfway down the block he came to a teahouse. Directly opposite the teahouse was a wide gate leading into a walled courtyard behind the Chanticleer.

David crossed the street and looked in. A middle-aged Chinese was supervising a group of coolies unloading cases of wine from a cart. David walked up to him and introduced himself as a caterer working for a wealthy English businessman. "My *tai-pan* is giving a dinner party for a group of New Delhi merchants. He has ordered me to obtain the services of a Hindu waiter," he said.

"You won't find any here, younger brother," the man replied. "This is a French restaurant. All of our waiters are Frenchmen. You will have to look elsewhere."

David suppressed a frown and tried again. "My assistant told me he saw one here. The man he spoke of is thin, with a very dark face."

"Your assistant is an idiot," replied the supervisor. "The man he saw is a Frenchman. I think his name is Picot. He came here from a place called Madagascar, where the sun burns all men black."

David was glum as he walked back to his hotel. If Picot had lived in Madagascar long enough for the sun to burn his skin to mahogany, he couldn't have met Rykker VanDort until they'd both come to China. And

VanDort had only recently arrived in Shanghai. David watched his Hindu theory vanish like a fakir off the high end of a rope.

A note was handed to him along with his room key when he arrived at his hotel. Amos Bascombe had called twice. David went to the telephone room and had the operator put him through to the Managing Director. David described his meeting with Rykker VanDort. "He may have been poisoned," he said.

"This is most disturbing, Mr. Feng, most disturbing. We must find the plate—and very soon. Mr. Catley has identified more counterfeit bonds. The total now stands at one hundred thousand dollars. Something must be done."

"That's two hundred certificates!" David said. A thought flashed through his mind. "Have you analyzed the serial numbers? Are they sequential?"

"As a matter of fact they are," Bascombe replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Did you receive the bonds through another bank acting as the seller's agent?"

"Yes. Hold on a moment. I have the papers right here." After a brief pause, Bascombe said, "I should have noticed this earlier. Each transaction occurred in batches of twenty bonds with sequential serial numbers. Six transactions were made in Tokyo, four in Yokohama."

"Cable there for information about the seller," David suggested. "Did you hear from Inspector DuBois on the two counterfeiters sentenced in 1898?"

"The information wasn't in his files," replied Bascombe. "Not that it really matters. I was reminiscing about the case with Mr. Catley this afternoon. He remembered a brief article that appeared in the *Financial Times* a few years ago. One of the counterfeiters died of typhoid fever in prison. The other one was released from Devil's Island after serving out his twenty-year sentence. I think his name was Picot. Yes, that's it—Charles Picot."

David hung up the phone. On the way to his room, it occurred to him that Charles Picot served quite a mean lunch.

A thousand sounds and odors filled the small room as night came over the foul, crowded *hutungs* in the poorer section of the Chinese quarter. From a tumbler of pink liquid beside his plank bed, a set of yellowing false teeth grinned at Charles Picot. He pulled the worn blanket tighter

around his shaking body. The malaria attacks had become more frequent and seemed to last longer now. This one had caught him just as he finished knotting a rope around the suitcase at the foot of the bed. Another delay. Now he would have to return to the restaurant in the morning to collect his pay. If it hadn't been for that Chinese sneak thief in Rykker's hotel room he might have found enough money or things to sell and be halfway to Hangchow by now!

He feared returning to the Chanticleer. When the police questioned him, he'd given a false name. The name Picot would have sent him to the guillotine. But they would undoubtedly return with more questions and this time they would find out his real name from the restaurant manager.

Another chill clamped him in its icy fist. Charles Picot closed his eyes and warmed himself with a flaming vision of Rykker VanDort roasting in hell.

David Feng chose a table in the teahouse opposite the rear of the Chanticleer. Screened behind a Chinese-language newspaper he could keep one eye on the courtyard and the other on the hired rickshaw waiting for him at the curb.

He drank tea and waited. By midmorning his rickshaw driver was beginning to fidget and David was wondering if Picot would ever appear.

The case had taken an unexpected turn since his telephone conversation with Amos Bascombe yesterday afternoon. Last night Sean Demaree had prepared supper for himself and David in his rooms behind the print shop and David had learned two more things about Rykker VanDort.

The Argentine passport showed that VanDort, traveling as Carlos Luis Hernandez, had made a trip to Japan since arriving in China. This suggested that VanDort was the man who had sold the counterfeit bonds in Tokyo and Yokohama. If the sale dates of the bonds fell within the two dates stamped in the passport, it might be possible to trace the funds through Hernandez' bank account—if he had one.

The second piece of information came from Sean and explained the look of sadness David had seen on his face while he had been examining the bond certificates. Rykker VanDort had been going blind. Sean was adamant on this point and had described the signs of the forger's affliction in the bonds' intricate scrollwork patterns.

This set David's thoughts off on a new track. He sensed that the bonds

were Rykker VanDort's swan song, completed before his eyes could betray him. It led him to another puzzling thread. Of all the financial instruments capable of being counterfeited by this master craftsman, why had VanDort chosen Chinese bonds? The workmanship required to forge them equaled that of any bond in Europe.

Suppose the choice had not been VanDort's? This raised the possibility of a third man. Was the third man Chinese? VanDort had apparently betrayed his comrades in France. If he'd been hired to make the counterfeit plate for a Chinese client to use at a later date, why not betray that man by printing himself a retirement bonus before turning the plate over to his client? The possibility certainly fit the dead man's character.

"*Ch'ien t'ou wan hsu!*" David muttered. "It has a thousand ends and ten thousand strands!" He put the paper down on the table and looked across the street in exasperation—just as one of the ten thousand strands stepped shakily out of a rickshaw. Charles Picot tottered across the courtyard and disappeared into the restaurant.

When he reappeared several minutes later and climbed back into the rickshaw David hurried to the street and roused his own driver. Seizing the poles, the driver cut through the crowded stream of traffic, his thumb-bell ringing. Picot stayed on the main streets, with David never more than thirty feet behind. Within twenty minutes they were in sight of the railway terminal building.

At the main entrance David paid his driver and took up a position just inside the waiting room, where he watched Picot, carrying a small suitcase tied with rope, go to the third-class ticket window. David moved in close enough to hear him say, "Hangchow."

Picot took the ticket in his shaking hands, checked the schedule, and hurried toward the number-three gate. A heavy-set man with the smell of a hide dealer about him stood between David and the ticket window. David withdrew some silver Yuan Shih Kai dollars from his pocket and a few moments later, with a third-class ticket in his hand, he fell in behind the hide dealer on his way to number-three track.

The scarred wooden benches in the coach were jammed with a wondrous variety of China's poor and near-poor. Charles Picot was the only foreigner traveling third-class. He sat by a window next to a sinewy up-country farmer who tried to maintain a safe distance between himself and the quaking "foreign devil." The little Frenchman never once looked

around him. With his coat collar turned up and his eyes closed, he sat shivering in the warm car.

Observing him now at close range David could see he wasn't drunk. As a young man, David had watched his adoptive parents administering quinine to cadaverous patients at their mission in the south and he recognized the symptoms. Charles Picot was suffering the final ravages of malaria.

It was late afternoon when the train arrived in Hangchow. Aroused from his semi-coma by the jostling of passengers, Charles Picot picked up his suitcase. David followed him from the station to a line of waiting rickshaws. Picot took the first one he reached. He was barely able to climb in with his suitcase. A tall rickshaw driver with a sweat rag knotted around his forehead caught David's eye and smiled knowingly when David sat down and ordered him to follow unseen behind the "foreign devil."

They moved steadily away from the center of town. David had his driver fall back to a safer distance as the road traffic thinned away to nothing on the outskirts of town. An hour before sunset they turned onto a deserted country road. David increased the gap between the two rickshaws yet again to three hundred yards. Up ahead he could see two widely separated buildings beyond which were the great house and quadrangle of a large estate surrounded by rich fields.

The nearest building proved to be a wine shop. David ordered the driver to stop behind its mud-brick walls. The second building, according to the driver, was a rundown inn. He used the words *shih tze* and made scratching motions as though his body were covered with lice. Looking around the corner, David saw Charles Picot's rickshaw stop in front of the inn.

After the empty rickshaw passed on its way back to town, David looked around the open country in disgust. There was no place to hide. Night was coming in. Unless they could wait closer to the inn without drawing suspicion, he might lose the one meaningful piece of the puzzle he had left.

He looked at his driver squatting between the shafts. The driver was gazing with longing through the open door of the wine shop. David's face broke into a sudden smile. He motioned the driver to follow him, saying, "We have an important matter of business to discuss. It is best done over a large bowl of wine."

Inside the shop David ordered two bowls of wine brought to their table. The rickshaw man drank heartily and listened respectfully to his generous passenger, who filled his ears with words of gold and his outstretched hand with pieces of silver. It was agreed. David accepted the dirty sweat rag and bound it around his own forehead. On his way out he ordered pickled vegetables and more wine sent to the driver's table.

Dusk was approaching down the plowed furrows of the land as David parked the rickshaw in front of the inn. He climbed into the seat and leaned back. The countryside lay bathed in the pink glow of evening. To the east of the farm estate, it briefly caught the faraway outline of a small shrine nestled among the trees on a low hill.

David Feng hunkered down in the rickshaw and waited for Picot.

A faint mellow glow to the east hinted of a full moon rehearsing its entrance in the wings of evening. David leaned back in the rickshaw. A mile away the first lamps were being lit in the rooms of the big country estate. From the inn to his left came the sounds of a wooden spoon being cleared on the rim of an iron cooking pot. His mind filled with quiet night thoughts.

Not too long ago, an unsuspecting Rykker VanDort must have passed along this road, carrying the counterfeit bond plate with him. David could imagine the thin shadowy form of Charles Picot, his soul filled with implacable hatred as he doggedly trailed his intended victim through the night. But something had made him delay his moment of revenge until yesterday, in the restaurant. Picot must have known VanDort had the plate, but in his weakened physical condition he knew he couldn't take it from the bigger man by force. Once he knew its destination and hiding place, however, he could kill VanDort before the man vanished from China, and then return and steal the plate. It would make a nice bonus for twenty years spent in hell.

A shadow from the inn's doorway caused David to turn his head. Picot was coming toward him. David jumped to the street and in voluble Chinese extolled the many virtues and cheap rates of his rickshaw. As soon as he was seated, Picot gestured impatiently toward the lighted windows of the country estate. With his big hands firmly grasping the poles, David swung the rickshaw to the center of the road.

They covered the first quarter of a mile at an easy pace. From the cluster of lights ahead, David saw one detach itself from the rest and

move slowly toward the little hill shrine. A moment later he heard Picot shouting at him in French. David didn't understand the words, but he understood from the man's tone of voice that he greatly desired speed.

David was soggy with sweat when he brought the rickshaw to a stop by the courtyard gate. Without a word, Picot clambered from the rickshaw and staggered up the moonlit flagstone path leading to the shrine. As David sagged between the poles to catch his breath a voice called to him. He looked up into the kindly faces of an elderly man and woman standing in the doorway of the servants quarters.

The man introduced himself as a *ma-fu*, the head stablegroom, and invited him in. Over tea and dried salted pumpkin seeds, David learned he was on the estate of Chang Pa Lo. The stablegroom and his wife described him as a kindly man whose lineage could be traced back to the time of the Yellow Emperor.

"His wife—she who lies in the shrine on East Rising Hill—was a woman of great beauty," the wife said. "Kindness dwelled in her like sunshine among the blossoms."

David looked about at the neat comfortable quarters. "Your master," he observed, "has given you a fine home to live in."

The old man smiled sadly at his wife and replied, "This is not our home. Home lies to the north, and it is there that our master, Chang Pa Lo, will soon return with all of us. A foul son of a turtle who calls himself a warlord drove our master from his lands." A grim scowl spread across his face. "Before the first frosts of autumn glisten beneath the moon, a thousand avenging fox spirits will have scattered his bones. She who now rests sadly on East Rising Hill will soon rest more happily in the land from which she came. Our master has sworn it."

David drank the last of his tea. "Do many foreign devils visit your master?"

The old man shook his head. "Only once before, two days ago. That one," he added with a chuckle, "was fatter than any swine in our fields."

"Where is your master now?"

"Each evening," his host replied, "he ascends East Rising Hill to be with her. He is there now."

David looked beyond his host to the hill. What he saw through the window sent a chill along his spine. The lampion in the shrine had swung violently a few times and gone out. He lunged through the doorway into the moonlight. His long legs took the flagstone steps in threes and fours.

By the light of a pair of beeswax candles he saw Chang Pa Lo lying on the floor next to an altar crypt. Blood was pouring from his head. There was blood on the butt of the lampion pole. Charles Picot worked in a blind frenzy, scooping joss sticks and ashes from a great carved-stone incense bowl into a package.

David stepped in and stared down at him in wonder. With a terrible shriek that echoed through the temple, Picot turned and stared up at him in shocked surprise. The package trembled in his hands. His eyes rolled back beneath their lids and his thin body convulsed once, trembled slightly, and collapsed like a pile of worn-out rags.

After a moment David took the package from Picot's lifeless hands and turned back to Chang Pa Lo. The old man lay with his eyes closed. One feeble hand felt along the cold stone floor until it came to rest, palm spread, against the face of the crypt. David knelt beside him and saw his lips move. He leaned closer to the dying man. The words came faint but clear from his almost motionless lips. "Before my bed, there is bright moonlight so that it seems like frost upon the ground. Lifting my head, I watch the—" The words trailed off into the final silence. His hand slipped to the floor from the face of the altar crypt.

The words stirred up memory and brought tears to David's eyes. Out loud, he completed the last lines of the ancient T'ang dynasty poem of exile. "Lifting my head, I watch the bright moon. Lowering my head, I dream that I am home."

David Feng stood at the office window, watching an isolated sunshower building a nest of rainbows in a clump of stubby-masted junks anchored in the river. "The poem is called *Quiet Night Thoughts*," he replied to Amos Bascombe's question. "It was written twelve hundred years ago by one of our greatest poets."

He turned back to the room. Sean Demaree stood waiting a respectful few feet away from the desk where Amos Bascombe sat with the counterfeit bond plate before him.

"For Chang Pa Lo," continued David, "the poem beautifully expressed the thought he was trying to convert into reality. If you understand the poem—particularly from his point of view—you will understand the basic problem, and the series of events that grew from it."

Bascombe slowly removed his pince-nez. "There are times," he said,

rubbing the bridge of his nose, "when I understand it all too well. Like Chang Pa Lo, I too am an exile. But my exile is temporary and by choice, whereas Chang was driven out of his home by a petty warlord. How he must have wanted him dead!"

"In these unsettled times, that could have been arranged easily enough," David pointed out. "But the death of the warlord meant nothing to Chang Pa Lo unless he could regain his estate and return his wife's body to the land they both loved. To do this he had to destroy the warlord and, at the same time, replace him with a man who would let him return to live out his days in peace on his estate. He thought of the weapon that could serve him best in his fight against the warlord. But he needed a weapon maker. He found him in Rykker VanDort."

"The world is full of weapons of destruction, but this one," observed Bascombe, tapping his finger on the counterfeit plate, "is utterly unique in my experience."

Sean Demaree, impatiently waiting for an opportunity to feast his eyes on the last great work of Rykker VanDort, edged closer to the desk.

"It's not as unique as you suppose, Mr. Bascombe," David said. With a barely suppressed smile, he added, "You're an expert with it."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"Money, Mr. Bascombe. Money. It works wonders with warlords. It's been known to work even greater wonders with their subordinate commanders. Chang Pa Lo arranged to buy enough of them to insure the warlord's death. He planned to finance their treachery from the sale of the counterfeit bonds. Afterward, the senior officer among the commanders would then become the new warlord and Chang Pa Lo would return home with his wife's body."

Amos Bascombe swiveled his chair to face David. As he did, Sean Demaree inched closer to the plate, the connoisseur's look of near-desperation in his eyes.

There was a tinge of worry in the banker's voice when he asked, "How many counterfeit bonds did Chang print?"

"None," replied David. "Remember the phony Mr. Carlos Luis Hernandez of Argentina?"

"Indeed I do! VanDort sold his counterfeit bonds under that name in Japan and deposited the money under Hernandez' name in this bank. The gall of the man!"

Pointing at the single counterfeit bond beside the plate, David said,

"Rykker stalled Chang Pa Lo. He wanted time to unload a few bonds for himself, unknown to Chang, before delivering the plate and that proof copy of the bond."

Bascombe turned back to the engraved plate on his desk. "Rykker could have been a great artist," the banker murmured as he studied the plate.

The innocent remark drew a look of choked outrage from Sean. David saw it and understood. To the mute ex-forgery, Rykker VanDort *was* a great artist.

Bascombe carefully placed the engraving in the precise center of his desk. "If it hadn't have been for the delay caused by Rykker's greed, there wouldn't have been any counterfeit bonds for Mr. Catley to find until it was too late to save the bank. Well, there is only one thing to be done."

Sean Demaree looked apprehensively at David as Bascombe opened a small penknife. The point of the knife furrowed the engraving in a quick series of side-to-side slashes. The silent passage of the knife across the metal was interrupted by a wheezing sigh and the sound of a body slumping to the floor. Bascombe peered over the edge of his desk. Sean Demaree had fainted.

"Whatever has come over the poor man, Mr. Feng?" Bascombe asked, astonished. "Is he in ill health?"

David loosened Demaree's collar. "He'll be all right in a few moments."

"What is it?"

"Shock," David replied. "You just destroyed the equivalent to him of the *Mona Lisa*."

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Indian summer always brought thoughts of Lily . . .

THE INSIDE TRACK

by MICHAEL J. MITCHELL



The race track is perfect at five-thirty in the morning, quiet and peaceful, nothing like the craziness during the afternoon. It's great just to sit up in the deserted grandstand with a cup of coffee and watch the horses work out. They gallop around the track, bobbing their heads and blowing fog out of their nostrils. The mountains, only a mile or so from Santa Anita, seem to jump out at you on a bright, clear morning, radiating orange and purple and green.

It's great to be at the track any time before the races start and things get crazy, but it's especially exciting about an hour before first post. Everybody's hustling and laughing and trading inside information—mostly made up—in the hope of getting some of the real thing in return. The place *smells* like hope. And when you get right down to it, that's what brings us all out there—the knowledge that no matter how bad your luck's running, there's a chance.

When you park your car and start that walk up the oily blacktop to the grandstand, all you can see are people moving fast, like ants, snapping their fingers or banging a rolled-up newspaper on their legs like a jockey going to the whip. Old guys in cheap suits hustle tip-sheets, trying to push the things under your arms and pick your pocket for a half dollar as you go by. And the place is full of old ladies eating sack lunches and talking horses to other old ladies. Most of them don't have five dollars and bus fare home but they plot, scheme, and handicap, then go home broke and eat tomato soup or worse and get ready to come back tomorrow.

There's even a little obstacle course, just to add to the excitement, but you never notice it unless you're running late for the first race and have to figure a way to get around it. It's a concrete wash that runs through part of the parking lot. It looks like someone started building condominiums, then gave up when they got the foundation in. It's just a cement hole with no water in it, but I mention it because that's where Ronnie wound up Monday night—at the bottom of it, with his throat slashed.

Ronnie was part of the show at the track and really the only regular who could get along with everybody all the time. A nice fella and a hustler, the only one I ever knew who made a living at the track. He didn't bet; he ran bets for people who worked at the track and couldn't go to the windows themselves, mostly the people who work behind the concession stands. He had quite a deal. He could go anywhere in the track he wanted and never had to pay to get in. He could go up in the turf club with the hot shots, back in the stables, anywhere. And he had a photographic memory. He never wrote a bet down and never came up a penny short. Ronnie didn't charge for taking other people's bets to the windows, he just expected a tip if you won a bit. But stiffes and big tippers alike all got the same warm smile and thank you from him.

He did pretty well at it, I guess. The rest of us always wondered how much Ron walked out with every night, and we'd tease him about sticking millions away in some Swiss bank. The standing joke if you went broke

was, "Go see Ron, bet old Ron ain't walking home tonight—he's got cab fare." I guess he got a big tip Monday night and some slob cut his throat for it. Anyway, he didn't have a dime on him when they found his body the next morning.

Ron was a couple years older than I am—about thirty-five, I think—but he looked sixty in the old green suit and dirt-brown tie he always wore. He kept his collar buttoned all day, but I couldn't figure why; he looked a mess with or without the top button closed. His face was like a pudding and just wouldn't have looked right in a \$500 suit—which, of course, he would never have bought in the first place.

But Ron was great. He had a huge mouth you could put both fists into when he smiled, which was always, and sort of a simple-minded look to him, but honest. I knew him in high school. Not well—he was a senior when I was a freshman and I guess I only talked to him a couple of times back then. But his sister! She was in my class at school—but she was way out of my class, so to speak. I was a tongue-tied, pimply dunce with too much fat around the middle and too much Butch Wax on top and had about as much chance with Lily as a dog that finally catches a car he's chasing.

When I met Ron again at the track, years later, I asked about Lily, but he just shrugged and said he didn't see her much, she was back East somewhere. I didn't sleep all that night wondering where she was.

Lily was a perfect strawberry-ice-cream-soda of a girl with perfect teeth and a dazzling smile that could blow your socks off a hundred yards away. She always walked perfectly erect, her head high and her arms swinging freely at her sides, Ronnie's smile was like hers: full, giving, and totally without self-consciousness. Lily didn't fit in our high school, on style alone. I was sure she'd get a scholarship to some big Ivy League school, wear wool sweaters and pert little horn-rimmed glasses, and have her first romance with some tweedy, fortyish literature professor who'd be gentle and important to her and introduce her to French wine and breathless lovemaking in front of a roaring fire.

But she'd gone up to Santa Barbara to college and stayed only one semester. Maybe she didn't like the radicalism or drugs or long hair or some such thing that was going on then or maybe she liked it all too much and flunked out, I don't know.

The day after Ron was killed, all the regulars were at the track—no

one wanted to miss the inside story. Even people who come to the track only twice a year were there, and all up and down the grandstand all you heard was talk of Ronnie.

I usually get to the track about eleven-thirty, an hour before first post, to give myself time to look around, check with some of the group for hot horses, and read the *Racing Form*. My first stop that day was Margie's concession stand. She's a nice old girl, about fifty-five, I guess, who uses too much black hair dye. She had Harriet working with her that day, an old witch with too much makeup and too many opinions.

I was still about fifty feet away from her stand when Margie started waving for me to hurry over. I thought she had some hot horses, most of which never come close to winning, so I laughed and shook my fist at her in mock contempt.

"You give me one more stiff, Margie, and I'm turning you in," I said when I reached her. "You're not supposed to be betting, you know."

She didn't seem to hear me. "Jack, did you hear about Ronnie? Can you believe it?" she said breathlessly. "Oh, God—you've got to do something!"

"Me? What?"

"Well, you and Ron were friends."

"What are you talking about? I didn't know a thing about him. He got robbed, didn't he? The police must be taking care of it."

"The police don't care about nothing."

"You have to have a license to be a detective."

"I don't mean you have to carry a gun and start waving it around. Just talk to some of the regulars. Maybe somebody saw something. The police haven't even stepped foot inside here."

"Yeah? Why should they? It happened at night, didn't it, after everybody left?"

Margie wanted to argue the point, but it was getting close to first post and I hadn't even opened the *Racing Form*, so I tried to cut her off and started walking away. That was a mistake. She slammed down a cup of beer she was pouring for some unsuspecting guy who just wanted to quench his thirst and almost jumped over the counter.

"Somebody's got to do something," she said, "and you were his friend."

"I hardly *knew* him, Margie," I said.

"Well, you knew his sister. You talk about her all the time."

"Wait! When do I talk about her?"

"Every time we go drinking."

"Oh, swell. You go out for a drink with a friend and she's taking notes."

"You talk about her all the time!"

"I just talk too much when I drink."

I could see I'd have to come up with something to shut her up, but I honestly couldn't think of a thing to do and just stood there shaking my head.

"Well, the least you can do is go clean out his locker for his family," Margie said.

"What locker?"

"He told me once he had a locker back in the warehouse they let him use—you know, for his extra clothes and stuff."

"I didn't know Ron *had* any extra clothes."

I could see that was the wrong thing to say and quickly agreed to do it. Anything to shut her up.

"Maybe you'll get lucky," she called after me. "I heard Lily's here for the funeral. You can take his stuff to her."

I glanced back at Margie for a few seconds to see if she was kidding about Lily, but I couldn't tell because she turned away and went back to selling beer and hot dogs.

All of the regulars were putting up five dollars each for some flowers for Ron, so I went over to Dave's stand. He's a bartender, and was holding all the money. I gave him mine, and we talked about the races for a bit. It was getting too late to be studying the *Form*, so I asked Dave who he liked. It looked like a lousy bunch of races that day anyway.

"I don't know, Jack," he said, thumbing the race program. "Ronnie used to talk about this number-three horse a lot—he knew the trainer or the hot walker or somebody. Why don't we get the three and put the money in the hat for Ron's family if it comes in?"

I said sure and Dave reached around for the Scotch. A free Scotch for me meant I had to come up with the money for the bet. I had fifty dollars that day, a lot for me, so I bet twenty on Ronnie's horse—ten for me and ten for the hat—but I felt guilty and decided to kick in the whole thing if it won.

It did. Barnstormer, the number-three horse, won by two lengths and paid \$16.40 for a two-dollar bet. I took the \$164 minus the original twenty I put in and gave the rest to Dave.

"That's great—Ronnie would love it," Dave said, counting the money like I'd stiff him five dollars. But no offense was taken and I got another free Scotch.

That was all the luck I had that day. After the sixth race I was down to six dollars, enough for three bets or two and a drink. I went back to Dave's bar because he sometimes gives me a free one when I'm going bad, and I figured I still had a little credit coming for running that bet for Ronnie.

Dave and I looked over the *Form* and decided we'd each put up five dollars on some slob of a horse to win and place. I was heading for the parking lot after the dog meat lost when I remembered Ron's locker and doubled back to the warehouse area. I didn't have any trouble getting in there, probably because no one guards the place, which is probably because there's nothing in there worth stealing.

Ron's locker turned out to be more like a trash can turned on its side next to a lot of boxes of beer cups and inventory sheets. There wasn't much in it, just some nasty-looking socks and some junk Ron had no doubt stuffed into his pockets and forgot to throw away. There were a couple of autographs from not-too-famous TV actors I suppose he got in the turf club and some old betting tickets. I wrapped the stuff up in some newspaper and left, wondering how I'd keep from looking like an idiot presenting this garbage to Ron's bereaved family.

I didn't have to wonder long, though, because a couple of the ugliest guys I've ever seen relieved me of the package before I got halfway to my car. They had large odd-shaped heads and fat hairy hands.

"Look, fellas," I said, certain I was being robbed, "would I be leaving after the seventh race if I had any money? This is just junk—you don't want this. Look, take my watch, O.K.? That's it—everything I got."

They told me to shut up, though I didn't see their mouths move. What I did see was a badge. Police.

The ride to the station was pleasant enough and when we got there it only took me about an hour of sweating blood to convince them I wasn't some grave robber or gangster. They knew about Ron's locker and had been waiting to see who'd claim the spoils. The only thing they were interested in was a stack of old betting tickets tied in a rubber band. They were the old kind the tracks used to use before they put in all this computer junk. Used to be when you made a big bet you got a stack of tickets or an exotic-looking thing printed in six colors. Not now. Now you

bet two dollars or two thousand and you get a computer printout. No class.

Anyway, I convinced the gentlemen I was just doing a favor for the family, and after checking my record they finally let me go. I didn't realize how scared I was until I got outside. I was shaking like crazy.

I went home to my apartment, actually a converted garage behind a house owned by an elderly couple I never see. I was shaken up and broke and had nothing to give Ron's family as an excuse to see Lily again. But mostly I was broke. My unemployment check was still three days off and even more depressing, I'd have to work for that lout Frank. He's a gardener who lets me rake leaves while he drinks beer in his truck at some millionaire's home where he's supposed to be manicuring the lawn. Except that I'm manicuring and he's sending out the bills. Why don't I ever fall into scams like that? But I do get four dollars an hour under the table and I can still collect unemployment.

It didn't dawn on me until I'd been home a while why the police wanted those mutuel tickets. They were at least two years old and you couldn't cash them now even if they were winners. I'd heard about attempts to counterfeit those old tickets, but I think it's impossible now with the computer stuff. Anyway, I didn't dwell on it. The police had the tickets and I was out of it.

The doorbell rang as I was debating whether I wanted cornflakes and beer or canned chili for dinner. I've kind of been waging this dietary warfare with my body since Judy and I broke up about two years ago. It's not that she was such a great cook or that I'm a lousy one. I just refuse to step inside a supermarket since they stopped giving out Green Stamps. I was just 150 books away from a color TV, and now those things are all stuck together and gathering dust in some drawer.

The doorbell rang again, so I opened the can of chili and threw it in a pan, figuring it could heat while I entertained company.

I thought I'd already met the two ugliest guys in the world, but those cops must have been numbers three and four because I was staring at the world's champs. They didn't have badges but they also wanted the mutuel tickets. When I told them the police had them, they settled for my arm.

They didn't really want my arm, they just wanted to move it behind my back a bit, then up to my neck and down over my chest. Number one asked me where I got the tickets and how the police found out about

them. I didn't have the nerve to tell them that Margie had bullied me into cleaning out Ronnie's locker, so I told them the family had asked me to go there and collect his things.

They made me tell them everything I knew about Ron, which didn't take long, then they gently ransacked the apartment. That done, they pointed their fat fingers in my face and gave me the obligatory tough-guy threats about calling the police and left.

I don't know why I started thinking so much about Lily then. Maybe it was because she was the one pleasant part of this whole business. It's not like we ever meant anything to each other, though I guess I did occupy one small moment in her life.

It happened when we were seniors in high school. I was working for the school newspaper and she had won some award or something, and I convinced the editor that I had to interview her.

She agreed to see me after school one day and she was warm and friendly. I tried to drag the interview out so there wouldn't be anyone left at school when we finished. I walked her out to her car afterward, and I remember that it was the last day of Indian summer, a perfect afternoon, the kind of day people in L.A. dream about.

We walked to her car just as the sun was beginning to set and it was so bright you had to shade your eyes. I looked over at her, and her face seemed incandescent—she had a warm open smile I knew she'd lavish on the first man who ever really meant something to her. For that one moment I felt as though I'd really known something very special. That was the last time I ever spoke with her, but now every time there's a day like that I think of Lily.

The doorbell rang again—I don't get this much company on Halloween—and I stopped cold, trying to decide what to do if the ugly twins had come back. But Margie called through the door for me to open up and I almost fainted with relief.

"Get in here, you," I said, throwing the door open, half angry at her and half glad to see her familiar face. "If you'd have gotten here twenty minutes ago I could have introduced you to a pair of real swingers."

"Yeah?" she said brightly.

"Right—like Harriet in drag."

"Oh, great." She sniffed the air. "What stinks?"

"Chili, burnt. Want some? I'll get a knife. It's kind of stuck to the pan."

I went to the kitchen for two beers and some crackers, knowing Margie wanted to talk about Ron and we could be at this all night.

"Yeah," I told her from the kitchen, "you missed a real show. A couple of the ugliest clowns you ever saw were here. They wanted that junk you made me get for Ronnie's parents."

Margie was properly concerned and wanted all the details. She asked whether I had called the police, and it suddenly struck me that the possibility of calling them had never entered my mind. Margie sat down and was suddenly very somber.

"Maybe you'd *better* call the police, Jack," she said, pulling two photographs from her purse. "I found these hidden behind Ron's locker. They're of him and some people I don't know. I think they're track people though."

Reluctantly I looked. "I don't know these people," I said. "And what do you mean hidden?"

"Hidden. They were taped to the back of Ron's locker."

"You're obviously the detective here, Margie. How come you asked me to check Ron's locker?"

"I didn't think you'd do it. Anyway, I was curious."

I wish I could say I had a good reason for convincing Margie that I should take the photos to Ron's parents, but I think I just wanted an excuse to see Lily. I told Margie I'd take the pictures right over to where I'd learned they were having a rosary service for Ron, and I did just that before thinking too much more about it.

I got to the church about fifteen minutes later. There were about fifty people there, all kneeling, heads bowed, mumbling responses to the priest's prayers. The church was huge and dark and it reeked of incense and dying flowers. And I discovered where Ronnie got his taste in clothes. Ron's father was sobbing and staring at the floor, and I couldn't help noticing he wore a tie just like one Ron used to wear. Maybe they got both of them at a two-for-one sale. You certainly don't see many like them around.

Ron's mother, a large lady, wasn't kneeling like the others. I guess she couldn't. She just sat in the front row with tears on her face and her eyes shut.

After the rosary a line formed to pay respects, and I had no idea how I'd have the nerve to give those photos to them. I just got in line and

hoped an idea would come to me. As I did, another fat hairy hand reached out and sat on my shoulder. That made five sets in one day. But the face at the end of this fat hairy hand didn't look nearly as menacing as the others. It turned out to belong to a cousin of Ron's, a fellow named Pat Simon.

He said he was very grateful that I would come to the service to return some of Ron's things and started to make up an involved story to explain why I should leave the photos with him, but I didn't want any explanations and handed them over. I didn't care whether he knew how I'd gotten them or whether they meant anything. I just wanted to leave. Lily wasn't there—but even if she had been it was ridiculous to have thought about approaching her at a time like this.

The whole thing was just too crazy. I would go home, get some clothes, and go to my brother's for a day or two. Maybe I'd do a little gardening with Frank after the funeral tomorrow, then go back to the track on Thursday.

I don't remember all of what happened when I got home, except I keep seeing my huge wooden front door hanging by a few splinters like a car had run through it. The place looked like a stick of dynamite had gone off, and I think I tried to yell or run or something, but I was stuck—frozen.

The ugly twins were there, leaning against the wall in the front room. Ugly number one reached for a thick piece of glass from the broken window, wrapped it in a piece of what used to be curtains, and pushed it toward my neck as number two moved behind me and took my arm again.

"You didn't say anything about pictures, punk," number one said. "We know the police don't have 'em. You do."

I just shook my head no, staring at that piece of glass, but they kept asking about the photos and where they were. Finally I told them.

They were gone a while before I realized what I'd done, and by the time I cleared my head enough to get to a phone to call the police it was too late.

Pat Simon was found a couple of hours later in the same wash where Ronnie was dumped, his throat cut with the piece of glass from my window.

They delayed Ron's funeral for two days so they could bury them at

the same time. I spent most of Wednesday at the police station. The newspapers said Ron had been involved in a scheme to counterfeit betting tickets several years ago, and when the computer-ticket stuff put them out of business Ron kept some tickets and those photos to blackmail his partners.

The police hadn't yet learned if Pat Simon had been involved. Ron's parents denied everything. They said Ron had found out about the counterfeiting and was gathering evidence.

I didn't think I could get myself to go to the funeral, but my brother insisted. Lily didn't attend. I heard someone say she was heading back to her job in New York right away and I figured she just couldn't face it. The funeral service was short enough. I didn't really hear a thing the priest said. I was thinking the weather was perfect, the kind of Indian summer day I knew it would be when Lily and I finally met again after so long.

Driving me back to his place after the funeral my brother tried to strike up some conversation to put me at ease. "You gonna spend a few days with Sally and me?"

"Sure—thanks." I could hardly get the words out and I hoped he'd drop it at that. We drove along Huntington Drive, a wide busy street, and I stared out at the traffic—not directly, but through the side mirror. I guess I thought it was safer to look at the world that way. Cars passed in front of the mirror and moved away, everything in reverse order. Things did look much easier to handle that way.

About a mile from Frank's we stopped at a red light and I noticed in the mirror a car parked across the street. I probably wouldn't have looked for more than a second, but it struck me as unusually rude that this huge, obviously able-enough man just sat in the back seat, slouched and wearing sunglasses, while a woman struggled to get in beside him. I can't honestly say I could pick those two out of a crowd of three today if the third one with them were an elephant. But for a moment there was this huge, coarse-featured hulk of a man— And the woman. She had a statuesque form and she flashed the man in the back seat a smile I'd seen only once before in my life. I turned around to look at the car so quickly that my neck cracked and my brother, who had stepped on the gas as the light changed, lurched to a halt.

"What? What the hell is it?" he asked.

"Nothing." I shook my head. "Nothing. Let's just go home."

When I turned around, the other car was gone. I went back to staring at the world through the side mirror, fighting off my brother's attempts at conversation.

"You're cracking up, kid," he said. "What the hell was it back there?"

"I don't know," I answered. "Maybe I *am* cracking up, seeing things in the mirror. I just thought I saw an old friend."



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Mrs. Charles sensed that she was going to be surprised by Miss Bayliss . . .

THE OTHER SIDE

by
**MIGNON
WARNER**



Milton Hall, with its plush carpeting, soberly fringed velour draperies, intimidating mahogany furniture, and vaguely dusty, brooding potted fernery could have been thought to be a relic of sophisticated Victorian gentility, a haven of tranquil repose where not even the cat would dare to tread on anything but tiptoe.

Avis Bembridge, the fifty-two-year-old widow who owned and ran the small seafront hotel, liked to think so anyway. She also liked to think that

Milton Hall, while not quite so luxuriously appointed as the five-star Grand Hotel further along the promenade, attracted a better class of clientele. In fact, she prided herself on it. If trouble came to Christmas Cove it booked into the Grand. She joked about it with several of her guests shortly before dinner on the evening of the day Edwina Charles, the clairvoyante, arrived at Milton Hall for a week's stay.

Knowing nothing of this, including the conversation which had given rise to Avis Bembridge's jest, Mrs. Charles had naturally wondered at the odd expression in the former's eyes and the slight hesitation of her response when she had paused on her way into the dining room later that evening to mention that her brother would be joining her in a day or two. She had thought no more of it until Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, whose table she shared at dinner that night, told her about the locally anticipated visit of two confidence tricksters.

The man and woman were rumored to be currently active in the Cornwall area. Their *modus operandi* (Mrs. Charles' eyebrows rose slightly as Mrs. Harrison elucidated) was for the woman to arrive first at a hotel, with her brother or husband (the family relationship between the pair was usually one or the other) joining her several days later. Thereupon they would systematically rip everyone off, from the hoteliers whose hospitality they enjoyed to other guests and local store owners. Mrs. Harrison wasn't sure, but she understood Mrs. Bembridge to imply that the pair were engaged in what was basically a credit-card fraud. Mr. Harrison, with all due solemnity, proclaimed them "astonishingly successful."

Not surprisingly, Avis Bembridge being somewhat lacking in Victorian tact and a compulsive gossip, the Harrisons were measurably cooler toward Mrs. Charles when they saw her at breakfast the next morning. Mrs. Harrison actually reached for her handbag, which she had placed against a leg of her chair while she ate her meal, and laid it squarely in her lap beneath her table napkin. She didn't check right then to see that her credit cards were all present, but the clairvoyante suspected that the woman was itching to take a look inside her bag and would do so the moment she and her husband left the dining room.

Breakfast was further enlivened by a visit from the local police. They glanced into the dining room, but didn't speak specifically to any of the guests. Their early-morning call might have been merely routine; then again, Avis Bembridge might have sent for them to check out the bona

fides of the newly arrived guest whose brother planned to join her later in the week. Mrs. Charles kept an open mind, but regretted more and more as the morning wore on and an unmistakable aura of suspicion and hostility began to manifest itself around her that the seriously ill friend, her reason for visiting Cornwall during what was definitely the off-season, was still unconscious after her stroke and therefore unable, if required, to vouch for her and their friendship.

It sounded, thought the clairvoyante, as she made her way toward the dining room at lunchtime, a likely story that she and her brother should be close friends of Naomi Starr, the world-famous seer. With Naomi physically incapable of denying it, anyone could claim to be her friend. Her collapse several days ago had been widely reported in the press and, indeed, it had been one such newspaper item that had brought Mrs. Charles to her bedside. The seer, a virtual recluse, had no immediate family, so it was no use looking for a character reference from that quarter either.

Sighing resignedly, Mrs. Charles entered the dining room several steps behind another guest, a Miss Leila Bayliss, to whom she was introduced by Avis Bembridge, who was standing just inside the doorway greeting her guests with the kind of gushing insincerity that made Mrs. Charles wince. Avis Bembridge then went on to suggest that, as the two women were alone, they might possibly care to share a table together.

Neither woman showing any displeasure with this arrangement, they were ushered across the room to a small table near a wide window overlooking the seafront and through which bright sunshine was streaming.

Miss Bayliss, a mousy, rather fragile-looking woman in her early sixties, paused momentarily and gazed rapturously out of the window at the pale, smoky blue sky. "Isn't Nature wonderful?" she remarked in a thin, tremulous voice.

"Indeed it is," responded Mrs. Charles, following the progress of three black-faced gulls as they wheeled and called raucously to one another high above the promenade.

Looking back at her table companion, she saw that Miss Bayliss was studying her intently. The clairvoyante smiled wryly to herself—the Harrisons were definitely not the only ones privy to Avis Bembridge's suspicions about her—and waited for Miss Bayliss to surprise her. She sensed instinctively that she was going to be surprised by Miss Bayliss in one way or another.

"You don't know how spiritually rewarding this visit to Christmas Cove has been for me," said Miss Bayliss fervently after a moment. A tremble of nervous energy passed visibly through her delicate frame. "I have crossed over many times, you know, but nothing over there can compare with the richness of my experience here."

Mrs. Charles gave her a thoughtful look. "Over there?" she inquired politely.

"To the Other Side," explained Miss Bayliss, wide-eyed. "My mother comes and takes me by the hand and says, '*Look, Leila; see how beautiful it is? You mustn't weep for me. I am so happy here.*'"

The clairvoyante met her table companion's earnest gaze unflinchingly. "How long has your mother been on the Other Side, Miss Bayliss?"

"She passed over five years ago. But I mustn't be distressed about it," Miss Bayliss assured her with an anxious frown.

"No, of course you mustn't," agreed Mrs. Charles. "It must be very comforting for you to be able to communicate with your mother and experience for yourself the beauty of her surroundings."

Miss Bayliss' face lit up with ecstasy. Clearly, she was not accustomed to receiving such a sympathetic reception, and she made the most of it, going on at some length to recount her experiences on the Other Side and again and again underlining her mother's assurances that she was completely happy there.

The longer Miss Bayliss talked, the more curious the clairvoyante became over her anxiety to emphasize her mother's complete happiness in her present surroundings. Had poor Miss Bayliss, she wondered, wanted to live her own life? Had this desire been fulfilled, resulting in her mother suffering some form of neglect which now overwhelmed the daughter in so much guilt that she had to stress continuously her mother's pleasure and contentment on the Other Side?

Miss Bayliss' voice intruded on her thoughts. "The last holiday Mother planned for us was to come here together. We had visited Cornwall once before, and Mother was so happy here. Then when I read in the paper about Miss Starr, the lady with the supernatural powers who lives here, I just knew I had to come to Christmas Cove and talk to her."

A sour-mouthed waitress deposited a basket of bread rolls on the table between the two women, the look she gave Miss Bayliss leaving Mrs. Charles in no doubt that she believed the poor woman to be mad.

"There are unfriendly spirits in this place," whispered Miss Bayliss, an

unhappy eye on the waitress's retreating back. "I'm so glad you're here. You understand, don't you?"

Mrs. Charles smiled at her kindly but was thankful that no one in Christmas Cove apart from her sick friend—and particularly this woman—knew that she too was a clairvoyante. She passed Miss Bayliss the bread basket.

"People don't understand, you know," Miss Bayliss continued, helping herself to a brown roll and breaking into it. "They think I'm mad. It's so comforting to meet a sympathetic soul."

Mrs. Charles was relieved to be spared having to say one way or the other what her own personal feelings were concerning Miss Bayliss' sanity. Without pausing, Miss Bayliss went on, "I tried to see Miss Starr, but they wouldn't let me. I told them how important it was, but they made me go away. She's been very ill, you know, and one of the nurses looking after her told me that if I came back bothering them again she'd call the police. It was all *very* upsetting."

Miss Bayliss' chin trembled and her colorless eyes filled with unshed tears. "I couldn't even go with my mother to the Other Side that night. I was far too distressed and upset. But I won't give up." Her small pointed face set determinedly. "I am going to stay right here until they do let me see her."

"You obviously have some very special reason for wanting to see her," observed Mrs. Charles.

Miss Bayliss gave her an odd look, as if she had expected that her table companion would know exactly what she desired from a meeting with the seer. She drew herself up and pursed her lips. "I simply *have* to talk to her. A sympathetic soul—someone who has shared my kind of experience on the Other Side. Mother told me—" she frowned quickly—"this was when she said Donald was only going to lead me astray and that I should forget all about him—" "Go to Christmas Cove, Leila," she said. "Just like we planned before I passed over. There you will find someone who won't laugh at you when you say how I come and take you by the hand and lead you to the Other Side."

Mrs. Charles forbore reminding Miss Bayliss that less than five minutes ago she had avowed that it was something she had read in a newspaper which had brought her to Christmas Cove.

"It's so beautiful," sighed Miss Bayliss, trembling with emotion.

The curious glances of the Harrisons, who were seated at a table directly

behind Miss Bayliss and openly eavesdropping on her conversation with Mrs. Charles, prompted the latter to consider the advisability of recommending to her brother that he should stay away from Christmas Cove for the time being.

"I'm sorry, Miss Bayliss," said the clairvoyante apologetically, her thoughts continuing for the moment to be taken up completely by the undisguised interest the Harrisons were displaying in them. "My attention was momentarily elsewhere. What did you say was beautiful?"

"The Other Side," replied Miss Bayliss earnestly. "I mustn't be distressed. Mother is really *very* happy there."

Immediately after lunch Mrs. Charles left the hotel to make a telephone call to her brother. Walking swiftly away from her in the direction of the rugged, grey-faced cliffs for which Christmas Cove was noted, her head lowered in concentration, was Miss Bayliss. There was something about her manner, the urgency of her short, jerky stride, that gave the impression that she was on her way to meet someone. Donald? The man her mother had warned would lead her astray—if, indeed, he hadn't already done so?

The clairvoyante watched her thoughtfully for a moment or two, trying, without much success, to make up her mind what it was about Miss Bayliss that suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, struck such a loud and very discordant note with her. Then slowly she directed her feet toward the telephone kiosk she remembered seeing when out earlier that day. A public pay telephone was located on the lower landing at Milton Hall, but she wanted to make absolutely certain that none of her conversation with her brother was overheard, particularly by the suspicious and indiscreet Avis Bembridge or the nervous Harrisons. She could just imagine what they would think if they heard her warning her brother off.

The clairvoyante tried unsuccessfully for ten minutes to get through to her brother's home before abandoning the attempt for the present. She retraced her steps as far as Milton Hall and then, on the spur of the moment, and for no particular reason, she set off after Miss Bayliss, who had long since disappeared.

Reaching the end of the promenade, Mrs. Charles started up a narrow, slightly slippery footpath that snaked its way over the cliffs, coming at length to a weatherbeaten signboard about halfway along a level stretch of fine turf that declared that particular spot to be Jupiter's Lookout.

Seated alone on a wooden bench a few yards back from a badly buckled and rusted iron guard rail was Miss Bayliss. She was gazing out to sea with an enraptured expression on her face. Mrs. Charles hesitated, as if to speak, then rightly deduced that there would be little point and moved quietly on, leaving Miss Bayliss to enjoy her visit with her mother on the Other Side.

Mrs. Charles saw Miss Bayliss on two more occasions that day, once in the distance wandering aimlessly along one of the cliff paths gathering dried stalks of grass into a ragged bunch, and then later, at the hotel, when they came face to face in the corridor outside the clairvoyante's room. Miss Bayliss looked straight through her, without any outward sign of recognition, and completely ignored her greeting. The Harrisons, Mrs. Charles expected—or Avis Bembridge—had obviously deemed it prudent to warn the anxious little spinster of the viper in their midst.

The small smile on Mrs. Charles' lips faded as Miss Bayliss disappeared behind the door of her room. There it was again, that strange feeling. Miss Bayliss behaved like someone teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Anxious, confused—and guilty, the clairvoyante thought musingly as she changed for dinner. That more than anything. Miss Bayliss had a guilty secret, one in which a man played a vital role. Mrs. Charles didn't need any special gift of second sight to see that. And in time Miss Bayliss would confess that guilt; if not, as Mrs. Charles had no doubt Miss Bayliss desired, to Naomi Starr, then to some other sympathetic soul. When the time was right.

The Harrisons were notably absent at dinner, and they missed breakfast the following morning. Avis Bembridge was uncharacteristically reticent about their whereabouts when Mrs. Charles made a polite inquiry about them around lunchtime.

As it turned out, that was hardly surprising. Mrs. Charles read all about the brazen pair of confidence tricksters in the local paper she paused to buy on her way to make a further attempt to contact her brother.

The Harrisons had apparently been recognized late the previous afternoon by a local shopkeeper whom they had defrauded of goods worth a considerable sum of money two years earlier, when he had been the proprietor of a small business in North Devon. The shopkeeper, without alerting the unsuspecting Harrisons—who, as fate would have it, had

been making a perfectly legitimate purchase at the time—had notified the police, who had arrested the pair. But not before Avis Bembridge and a good many other unsuspecting local business people had fallen prey to them. Smiling to herself, Mrs. Charles folded the newspaper and turned back to the hotel without bothering to make her telephone call. There was no reason now why her brother shouldn't join her as and when he wished.

Miss Bayliss, she noted, was a hundred or so yards ahead of her, walking along the promenade in the direction of the cliffs. As she watched the frail little figure grow smaller and smaller, she wondered whether Miss Bayliss too had been one of the Harrisons' victims. It seemed likely, and would certainly account for some if not all of her erratic behavior. Worry and anxiety over some rash act involving the Harrisons could easily be mistaken for a guilty conscience. Mrs. Charles imagined she would find out once the initial shock of Avis Bembridge's own folly had worn off and loosened her tongue again.

"Yoo hoo, Mrs. Charles!"

The clairvoyante looked around expectantly. Her brother's bus wasn't due in for another seven minutes, and in any event it was a woman's voice which had hailed her.

Miss Bayliss was standing on the bus station's forecourt surrounded by luggage, presumably not all of it hers, waiting for her bus to take her back home. She began to gather up her belongings, as if to join Mrs. Charles. She looked relieved when she saw the clairvoyante coming toward her and abandoned her juggling act with the luggage, most of which was contained in a series of polythene carrier bags.

"I just wanted to say how sorry I am for being so rude to you in the corridor the other night," said Miss Bayliss as Mrs. Charles joined her. "I feel so upset about it. That unpleasant Mrs. Harrison saying those unkind things about you when all the time she and her husband were such wicked, deceitful people! How could that horrid Mr. Harrison be so cruel and trick me into lending him fifty pounds until the banks opened? He promised me faithfully I'd get my money back first thing next morning. Mother was very angry with me. I got such a telling-off about it! She warned me he was up to no good. 'He's just like that smarmy young man who used to come calling on you,' Mother said to me. 'You mark my words.' She said, 'He won't keep his promise to you either.' She was right

too. That nasty man had no more intention of paying that money back than Donald had of marrying me. Mother is always right," she sighed. "I can see that now. But it does make me angry sometimes. I can't always live my life just for Mother, can I?"

Most of the luggage surrounding Miss Bayliss had disappeared and people were starting to board the bus, which had been standing nearby with its engine idling. Miss Bayliss picked up a small suitcase and started to gather up her assortment of carrier bags.

"It's a pity I didn't find out the truth about Donald, my gentleman friend, until after Mother had passed over," she went on. "I killed her, you know. Suffocated her with her pillow after she was so cross with me for talking to our next-door neighbor instead of hurrying up with her medicine. Nobody ever found out. Mother had been bedridden with a weak heart for years. They all thought it was heart failure—you know, natural causes."

Miss Bayliss paused and frowned earnestly. "But it's all right. I visit with Mother every day and she takes me by the hand and says, 'Look, Leila—see how beautiful it all is over here? You mustn't weep for me. I'm so happy here.'"



The license plate read O HENRY . . .

HOUSE CALL

by

BILL

PRONZINI

AND

JEFFREY

WALLMANN



It was a few minutes past three o'clock when Christine Taylor parked her compact on San Lorenzo Way, in front of the Morris home and directly behind a dusty Ford station wagon with a personalized license plate that read O HENRY. Both cars seemed out of place in the forested elegance of St. Francis Wood, one of San Francisco's wealthier neighborhoods. With two Mercedes parked in the vicinity Chris wouldn't have been surprised to see a Rolls Royce come gliding around a corner.

She took the packages of Beauty Express cosmetics from the seat beside her, closed the car door with her foot, and started up the broad flagstone path that led to the Morris veranda. The house was set apart from its neighbors by stands of eucalyptus and landscaped gardens and lawns; dwarf cypress and shrubbery grew along the veranda and the side walls. The overall effect was of a small country estate rather than a house on an urban street.

When Chris neared the veranda, peering around the tiered boxes so she could see where she was going, she caught a glimpse of the small discreet sign to one side that said *Tradesmen Use Side Entrance*. Although she was not a tradesperson in the strictest sense of the term, and had been admitted through the front door three days before, when her first visit here had produced a sale to old Mrs. Roberta Morris, she felt it would be proper to make the delivery at the side entrance. Besides, Mrs. Morris suffered from an inflammation of the joints called *brachial radiculitis*, coupled with muscle spasms of the trapezius—the old lady had explained this to Chris in great detail—and consequently spent most of her time upstairs in her bedroom. Her live-in maid handled most household matters.

Turning onto the path to her left, Chris made her way around to the north side. A thick screen of oleander bushes partially obscured the side entrance from the path, so that you couldn't see the door until you were within a few feet of it. The boxes of cosmetics further hampered her vision; Mrs. Morris had bought over fifty dollars' worth of lotions, powders, and makeup.

A half dozen paces from the entrance, she felt the boxes start to slip in her grasp. She was so busy trying to keep them balanced that she didn't hear the door open or see the man who came around the oleanders on a sudden collision course.

When they ran into each other, the impact sent her sprawling onto the lawn and the packages flying. She landed on her hip, without damage to anything except her dignity, but a startled "Ouf!" came out of her. She pushed onto one knee and stared up at the man standing on the path.

He was tall, middle-aged, distinguished-looking, dressed in a chalk-striped suit and carrying a black doctor's satchel. He looked almost as amazed as she felt. He also looked harried and preoccupied; running his free hand through his salt-and-pepper hair he asked in a peremptory manner, "Who are you?"

"Aren't you going to help me up, Doctor?"

"Oh—yes, of course. Sorry." He extended his hand. Chris took it and let him pull her to her feet. He looked at her, at the packages strewn over the lawn out toward the front of the house. His distracted manner reminded her of her father, who was a resident physician at St. Theresa's Memorial Hospital here in the city.

"Is Mrs. Morris ill?" she asked him.

"Yes, but it's nothing serious." He glanced again at the packages, but when Chris bent to restack them he made no move to help her. "Are you making a delivery?"

"I was about to, yes. Beauty Express Cosmetics. May I ask what's wrong with Mrs. Morris, Doctor? Is it the *brachial radiculitis* again?"

He raised an eyebrow. "How do you know about that?"

"She told me about it the last time I was here."

"I see. Well, you're right—that's the problem."

"I hope it doesn't put her back in her wheelchair," Chris said. "She says she hates it when her trapezius muscles get so bad she can't walk."

"It probably won't come to that. I gave her something to relieve the pain." He looked at his watch. "If you'll excuse me—" And he started away along the path.

Chris finished stacking the boxes, lifted them in her arms, and hurried after him. When she caught up she said, "I might as well leave too. If Mrs. Morris is ill, I don't want to disturb her."

The tall man nodded abstractedly.

"Are your offices near here, Doctor?" she asked him.

"Yes, they are."

"Then you've done some work at St. Theresa's."

"That's right, I have."

"My father is a resident there, so you probably know him. Vincent Taylor."

"Why, yes, I do know Vincent. An excellent man."

"I think so too," Chris said. "I'll mention that we met. Doctor—?"

"Hoskins." They had reached the sidewalk and he started toward the dusty station wagon. "Sorry again about bumping into you, Miss Taylor," he said over his shoulder. "Have a good day."

"You too, Dr. Hoskins."

Chris moved over to her compact and stood watching him get inside the station wagon and drive away. As soon as he had disappeared around

the first curve, she tossed her packages into the back seat and ran back up the driveway. When she reached the side entrance she opened the door, not bothering to knock first, and went inside.

It took her less than thirty seconds to find Mrs. Morris and her maid. They were in the sitting room, bound to a pair of wingback chairs and gagged with handkerchiefs.

Swiftly she untied them. She paused long enough to determine that neither of the frightened women had been harmed, then she hurried to one of the downstairs extension phones to call the police.

"There's been a robbery at Number 79 San Lorenzo Way in St. Francis Wood," she told the officer who answered. "The man responsible claims to be a doctor, but he isn't. He just drove off in a Ford station wagon with a personalized license plate that says O HENRY. If you hurry you probably can catch him before he gets too far away."

"They did hurry," Chris said to her father that evening, "and they caught him about twenty minutes later, over in Golden Gate Park. The station wagon didn't belong to him; he stole it this morning from a parking lot downtown. His real name is Hammond, not Hoskins, and he's a professional burglar who specializes in robbing wealthy homes. The police found five hundred dollars in cash and all of Mrs. Morris jewelry in the doctor's satchel."

"But how did you know he was a thief and not a doctor?" her father asked.

"He made me suspicious right from the first. So I maneuvered him into saying two things that convinced me he was neither a doctor nor an invited guest of Mrs. Morris."

"What two things?"

"I said I hoped Mrs. Morris' *brachial radiculitis* wasn't serious enough to confine her to a wheelchair again, because she hated it when her trapezius muscles got so bad she couldn't walk. He said it probably wouldn't come to that. But there isn't a doctor alive who doesn't know that *brachial radiculitis* is an inflammation of the *shoulder* joints, not the leg joints—or that the trapezius muscles are in the upper back—and that it wouldn't confine anybody to a wheelchair."

"What was the second thing?"

"You were, Dad. I got him to say he'd done some work at St. Theresa's,

and then I said my father, Vincent Taylor, was a resident there and he must know you. He said he did."

"Ah," Philip Taylor said.

"And if I needed any more proof, there was that license plate on the station wagon. O HENRY. No doctor making a house call would drive a car with a personalized license plate instead of one with a caduceus—an MD plate."

Her father nodded. "Now tell me why you were suspicious enough at first to go on and bait your verbal traps."

"Two reasons," Chris said. "When he knocked me down he didn't ask if I'd hurt myself; he didn't even offer to help me up. A real doctor wouldn't have been that careless. But it's the other thing that really made me suspicious." She reached out and took his hand. "Dad, if you'd been attending a woman like Mrs. Morris, would you have left the house by the tradesmen's entrance when the front door is much closer to the street where you'd left your car? No. And no other physician would either. The front door is always the proper entrance for a visiting doctor."

Philip Taylor shook his head admiringly. "You're quite a detective, you know that?"

"Not really, Dad. It was all a simple matter of house calls."

"House calls?"

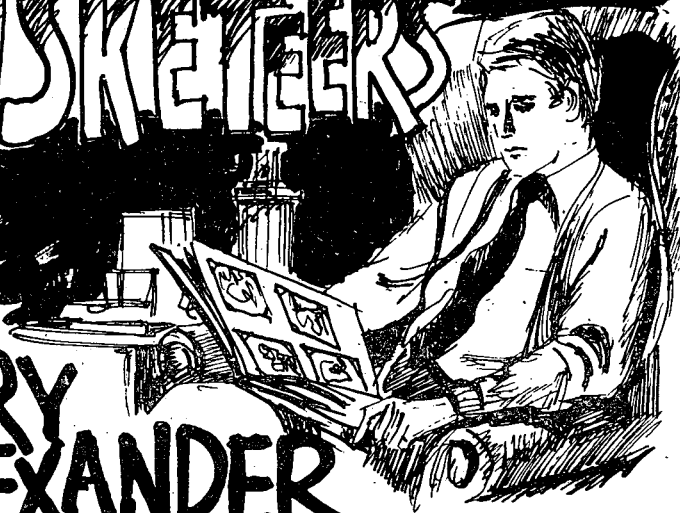
"Sure," Chris said, smiling. "The burglar picked this day to make his, ran into me as I was making mine, and made the mistake of pretending to be a doctor on a medical one. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to figure out that that's one house call too many."



A vicious killer had snuffed out the third musketeer . . .

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

by
**GARY
ALEXANDER**



We were then two musketeers, Lon Michaels and I, paying homage as pallbearers to the third. It had come as a surprise when Lois, Jimmy Gardner's widow, called and asked me to serve. I had last seen Jimmy ten years earlier—an unpleasant meeting, at that—and I had never met Lois.

Why? I wondered out loud. Simple enough, she said. When you, Lon, and Jimmy were growing up together you were inseparable. You tagged

yourselves *The Three Musketeers*. Jimmy had, she said, reminisced often about that with some sadness.

After that barroom incident with Jimmy a decade ago, I never expected to see him again. Ironically, I didn't during his funeral either. He had been found a week ago in his car, at the end of an abandoned wharf, bludgeoned to death with a heavy object. There was only so much magic in the mortuary cosmetologist's bag of tricks, so it was a closed-coffin service.

After the interment I chatted briefly with Lois, who seemed calm and controlled behind the traditional bleak veil. I hadn't seen Lon Michaels in ages and we made a date to get together later in the week for lunch.

Marlene must have read my mind. Perhaps it's the eerie clairvoyance that occurs in odd moments when you've been married seventeen years, but we were barely in the door when she said, "The album."

It took her a while, but she located it in a dark corner of the attic and set it on the coffee table. It was as dusty and yellowed as my friendship with Lon and Jimmy.

I didn't touch it until after dinner and TV, after Marlene and the kids went off to bed. Marlene didn't question my patience, intuitively knowing that my reacquaintance with the album and its memories was best a private reunion. I heated a kettle of water, made a cup of tea, and began.

The old cliché about your entire life flashing before your eyes happened to me that evening, but not during an instant of extreme peril. It was a leisurely process—but as I progressed through the old black-and-white prints they seemed to take on animation and sound.

Jimmy Gardner, Lon Michaels, and myself—David Porterfield—had grown up together. We were war babies, about two years old when Hiroshima and other events allowed our fathers to be mustered out of the military.

The industry in the area shifted rapidly from guns to butter, so our fathers were able to find good-paying jobs immediately, and with that sudden affluence all three families put money down on homes in a tract in progress known as Oakwood.

Here was a picture of me, a porky little urchin in a sailor suit atop our old Nash. Behind me was our future home, a skeleton of two-by-fours and clapboard.

Suburbia wasn't yet in the common vernacular, but the subdividers

built and built, and, looking closely at the edges of one photo and another on the opposite page, I could see parts of identical compact saltboxes on each side of us. These were to become the homes of the Michaels and Gardner families.

I was moving on now, turning pages, trying for the life of me to remember who pinned the Three Musketeers label on us. Perhaps Lon would recall. We were about eight years old in one photograph, with gap-toothed grins and wooden swords and scrap-cloth capes. All for one and one for all.

I came to the unforgettable eight-by-ten glossy taken by Lon's father. Mr. Michaels owned the auto-parts store Lon inherited. Mr. Michaels was also a camera buff. He was very proud of this particular shot. He took it with a new camera, a Leica, which he said was the finest in the world. He made prints of it in his darkroom for all three of us. I have to admit it was a pretty good piece of work. He caught us in midair as we leaped gleefully over a sprinkler, three little boys in swim trunks, defying gravity, locked forever in time.

Whose yard was it? Like the houses, they looked damn near the same. It was probably the Michaels', I thought, squinting at the out-of-focus background, studying the clutter to the rear. Mr. and Mrs. Michaels had been very big on 1950 backyard chic. The portable barbecue on the postage-stamp patio, the concrete bird bath, its base shaped like a cherub, the *two* ceramic—pink?—flamingos with their spindly steel legs piercing the planet.

Then, abutting the house, the beds of their pathetic midsummer flowers, struggling to thrive in the heat and the subsoil clay that frustrated all would-be Oakwood gardeners.

Oakwood, you see, had no oak, no trees of any sort, no topsoil. The developers, in preparing the site, believed in the scorched-earth policy.

I closed the album, leaned back, and rubbed my eyes. Enough. Too much, too fast. My first definitive memories were not of the womb, the high chair, or the crib. Mine were a hearty stew of tricycles on the sidewalk and the jolts we got when we raced from one square to another that had settled, of the forays for grasshoppers and frogs, of the dangerous and heroic missions in the vacant wooded lot up the street. Jimmy, Lon, and I. All for one and one for all.

It was simply too evocative to take in one large dose.

I met Lon for lunch at a restaurant in a new shopping mall near Oakwood. I worried on the drive over what we would talk about. The Three Musketeers had splintered apart after we entered high school.

While Jimmy and I participated in normal school activities, Lon worked almost every afternoon in his father's store. It wasn't a sweat-shop arrangement—Lon seemed to use it as an excuse not to become involved in anything new. Even as a kid he was set in his ways. If anyone dreaded change, it was Lon.

And he was a packrat. I thought back to the sprinkler photo, willing to bet that he'd hung onto every backyard item that had been passed on to him when his father died.

We shook hands and ordered beers. Not counting Jimmy's funeral, I hadn't seen him since my college days, a good fifteen years ago. He hadn't changed much, except for the salt-and-pepper hair and the paunch.

"Still here?" I asked.

Lon cocked a thumb toward the window. "Across the way," he said proudly. "Next to the Hallmark. Michaels Auto Parts—same business, different location. I moved out of the old shopping center six months ago when this place was built. It turned the original center into a ghost town. The lease'd choke a mule, but I didn't have any choice."

I could see Lon's sign and also, at the corner of the complex, another belonging to an auto-parts chain that was heavily advertised. I didn't mention that observation; I doubted if it would do his digestion a bit of good.

"Looks prosperous from here," I said.

Lon shrugged, finished his beer, signaled the waitress for a refill, and said, "It's a living. I'm hanging in there."

"How's your mother?"

"Great. She's living with Sis and her husband in San Diego."

"Sold off the old homestead in favor of year-around sun? Makes sense."

Lon shook his head. "She didn't sell it, Dave. I'm still living there. You'd be surprised. Except for paint schemes and an addition here and there, the old neighborhood looks about the same."

I sipped my beer and didn't reply. I had been dead certain he'd stayed in the auto-parts business, but while I knew he was a bachelor I'd assumed he'd taken an apartment somewhere, made *some* break with his childhood.

It was funny, aside from geography, how we'd managed to stick together as long as we had. Jimmy was the total opposite of Lon, willing to try

anything at least once. I was dead-center between them in that respect, and in many other ways. Maybe I was the glue of the relationship.

We exchanged nostalgia and the smallest of small talk, and by the time we'd almost finished lunch we got around to Jimmy.

"I hear he was doing quite well for himself," I said.

"Sure was. He was just rolling in the bucks. He'd gotten into real estate and had two offices."

"Sounds like you kept in touch."

"I ran into him," Lon said, "I think it was last spring. He pulled up next to me at a stop light and we recognized each other. We stopped and had a drink together. He had a land deal going out this way."

"That doesn't sound like the Jimmy I remember," I said.

"From when?"

"Right after I got out of the Army. We went out for a night of pub-crawling. That was it. Too many differences."

"He was kind of a peacenik then, wasn't he?"

"That was part of it," I said, anxious to change the subject.

"How about you, Dave? Are you still an engineer?"

"Yeah. You know how it was when we were in school. You're good in math and science and it's the natural step. Almost patriotic. Get in there and fight the Sputnik menace. Put a man on the moon before the Commies do."

"Did you?"

"No. I was discharged from the Army two days before Apollo Eleven touched down. I'm in hydraulics, systems for industrial machinery. Nothing I've ever worked on has been light enough to get off the ground, let alone into outer space."

Lon laughed. "Why did you guys—" he hesitated—"stop being such good friends? You were real tight through high school. You went off to State at the same time."

"Jimmy went into liberal arts—engineering was on the other side of the campus. By the time we were sophomores we hardly ever saw each other."

"That pub-crawling thing," Lon pressed. "You got into a beef?"

I knew he wasn't going to let it drop. Even as a kid, Lon was tenacious. He'd hound you into a headache until he got his answer. And now, the way he was hitting the sauce—five or six beers, the last couple with a shot on the side—I'd be here until Armageddon.

"It started out friendly enough," I told him. "We rehashed old times, toasted the future and all that, but later he started preaching about the war. He had the beard and the sandals, the full nine yards. You know he jumped from fad to trend like a butterfly. Evidently that was his hippie period.

"I explained that I wanted to talk about something else, that I didn't care for the war any more than he did but I'd been back in the Land of the Big PX for less than a month and was a little sensitive about certain topics.

"I'd flown transport helicopters, ferrying troops to and from fire zones. Those ships were fat, slow, juicy target drones for snipers. I lost a lot of buddies that way. I almost bought it myself once, hovering above elephant grass near Vinh Long. An AK-47 round took off the top of my flight helmet.

"I asked Jimmy to kindly lay off and burn his draft card elsewhere—I thought the war was asinine too, but I felt that a 4-F in need of a shampoo was not qualified to discuss the subject.

"He leaned over and asked me how many villages I'd napalmed. I knocked him off the bar stool. We thrashed around on the floor until they tossed us out the door. It wasn't like in the movies where you cool off on the sidewalk, have a big laugh, shake hands, and head off to the next saloon arm in arm. This was final. Until the other day."

Lon just stared, then drained his beer. He picked up the check despite my protests, paid it, and we walked out to my car.

"I wonder if the police have anything yet," Lon said.

Then it struck me as peculiar that we had managed to skirt any conversation about the murder. We'd blathered on about ancient history while there was a vicious killer on the loose who had snuffed out the third musketeer.

"I haven't seen anything in the papers since the day after the murder," I said. "His wallet and watch were missing, so they figured he was jumped somewhere, things got rough, and he was killed in the struggle, so they drove his car to the wharf and took off. Muggers who got in over their heads. That's the consensus."

"It's not safe to walk the streets any more," Lon said unsteadily. "Look, Dave, any time you're in the area, drop by, see the old block again. I'm home most every night, except for bowling league."

I said I definitely would take him up on it. We shook hands and parted.

I surmised the invitation hadn't been extended with any more sincerity than my acceptance.

I watched as Lon headed to his store, not entirely avoiding parked cars en route. I didn't blame him. You dredge up intense memories and something snaps—you're entitled.

I visited Lois Gardner the next morning. We hadn't had a chance to talk much at the funeral. I wanted to know her better, to thank her for asking me to be a pallbearer.

And Jimmy. A brawl over a political disagreement was a stupid, immature way to end a lifelong relationship. I imagine we both regretted it. We had each waited too long for the other party to pick up the telephone. I rang the doorbell, feeling guilty as hell.

It was a very fashionable neighborhood in town, an old neighborhood filled with rehabbed Victorians. Everything on the street, I guessed, was worth in excess of a hundred thousand. The Gardner home didn't stand out, but it wasn't the runt of the litter either.

Lois showed me in. She was a slim, elegant woman, no less than five years older than her late husband.

I accepted her offer of a drink. We sat in the living room on period furniture that had not come cheap. Jimmy had indeed done well.

I looked at the photographs on the fireplace mantle. Jimmy was there, clean-shaven. He had changed little. He appeared in another shot, a group photo with Lois and two young women.

"Jimmy's stepdaughters," Lois said. "They're both married now."

I detected an emotional timbre in her voice, but it was under control. I was relieved. The chances were slim that she'd break down in front of me, but if she did I wouldn't know how to handle it.

We talked through two more drinks, though it was mostly a question-and-answer session. Lois was interested in knowing more about our boyhood.

"Jimmy would bring up your name from time to time," she said. "I asked why he didn't get in touch with you and he'd shake his head. I'd let it drop, figuring it wasn't any of my business."

I told her about the brawl. Lois Gardner was a chain smoker. She put one out, lighted another, and said, "Well, that was just before we met. He was at loose ends and so was I. My husband had just passed away. Jimmy eventually grew up, later than most. He was a good man and a

good businessman once he applied himself. The real-estate business was my first husband's, but after Jimmy and I married it took off. Lately he'd become obsessed with it and the money it generated, as if it were a Monopoly game. He enjoyed the trappings of it—the nice cars, the clothes, the status—but I sensed a restlessness. You knew him. You knew his interests were intense but fleeting. But I felt his discontent included me. I was a *more mature* woman when we married. Of late, I believe he regarded me as an *old* woman."

Lois stopped talking. It was my turn. No way. I wouldn't field that one with an asbestos glove.

She opened a fresh pack of cigarettes and continued. "The police asked if he had other romantic interests. I asked them if they meant singular or plural. Then there was a matter of some unaccounted withdrawals in the business accounts—a twenty-thousand-dollar chunk in particular. We're auditing right now, and it's speculated that Jimmy was making some informal investments. Little secrets between him and the IRS."

"Do the police have anything concrete?" I asked.

She replied with a tight smile. "Just me."

"I don't believe that."

"I can't blame them," she replied. "Statistics in murder cases point to the surviving spouse as often as not. When you factor the girl friends and the missing money into it and add the knowledge that I was fifty-one-percent owner of the business, in a position to bring him down like Humpty Dumpty if I so desired—well, detectives are logical people."

I made my excuses and Lois escorted me to the door. This was quite a lady. I couldn't imagine her giving way to violent, spontaneous explosions of anger. If she wished to exact revenge, she was capable of doing it legally—psychologically and/or financially—one painful jab at a time.

Also, she was birdlike, bordering on frail. She was physically incapable of overpowering and killing an average-sized man like Jimmy in such a brutal fashion, then dragging him into a car and depositing him on that wharf. I pointed that out to her and suggested she relay it to the law.

"Oh, they know that, David," she said. "At least, I think they do. My guess is that they're trying to locate whoever I hired."

"Do you think she had someone do it for her?" Marlene asked me.

"I think she's capable—but no."

"If he had some shady real-estate dealings, it could be someone he cheated."

"Jimmy was no cheat," I snapped.

"Sorry."

"So am I," I said, immediately regretting my outburst. Hell, I hadn't seen him in ages. "Sorrier," I added.

Marlene picked up the album from the coffee table where I'd left it. "Are you done with this?"

I took it from her and browsed. Our teenage days. My '55 Ford Vickie, the three of us perched on its hood in t-shirts and jeans, looking quasi-macho and silly. It was the last snapshot of The Three Musketeers together.

Jimmy and I had worked a solid week on that car, installing dual carburetors. We had botched it badly. We were high school seniors then, and hardly ever saw Lon, but we'd talked him into getting us the parts wholesale. We even persuaded him to bring Mr. Michaels over to set up the linkage for us. We'd done it all backasswards. He always carried his camera in his car and he took this picture after he finished.

I thumbed back to the sprinkler scene and stared at it, unable to summon lights, camera, action.

I handed it to Marlene. "I'm done," I said.

I hunched over my drafting board, allegedly designing a hydraulic lifting assembly for a client. It was all lines, numbers, and squiggles; I couldn't concentrate.

I picked up the phone and called the police. The operator put me through to the homicide detective assigned to the Gardner case.

I identified myself, explained my relationship to Jimmy, and asked if they were making progress. The detective was reticent to go into detail, which I could understand, but he was pleasant and cooperative in giving me the generalities.

"It stands pretty much as it did," he said. "We're working on a couple of possibilities, but nothing concrete yet. It happened as described in the papers. He was found at the end of Pier Eighty, which was condemned and unoccupied for the past year. A large warehouse obscured the view of the car from the street. A couple of kids who walked out there to fish found him. The murder weapon was large and heavy. It wasn't in the vicinity and we don't know what it was."

"Large timbers laid on and bolted to the edges of the wharf serve as guard rails. Fresh gouges indicate that somebody set Mr. Gardner's car in gear and tried to run through or over them. They were unsuccessful in getting his car into the water and gave up."

"A gangland-style thing?" I asked.

"We've ruled out a professional hit," the detective said. "Our local wise guys are more efficient than that."

"Are there any other leads you can tell me about that won't compromise your investigation?" I asked him.

"Just one," the detective said. "We know the crime took place elsewhere—probably in the south or east suburbs. There were traces of a clay-base soil on the backs of Mr. Gardner's shoes, which indicates he may have been dragged to his car. Most of the soil within the city limits has a sandy loam composition."

"Which narrows it down to—"

"Roughly two hundred square miles."

"Thanks for your time."

"No problem. I really am sorry about your friend."

"Thanks."

I hung up. Nice guy, but the conversation was akin to the proverbial Chinese dinner. I had a hunch, a hunch too evil and guilt-inducing to dwell on. Before I changed my mind I dialed Mark Hayes's number.

Mark and I graduated in mechanical engineering the same year. We worked for the same firm for a while and kept in sporadic contact, although Mark had been out of the profession for some time.

He'd gravitated into aerospace and eventually become disgusted at the roller-coaster nature of the field. After his last layoff he got out of engineering altogether. He drifted through a series of jobs, finally settling into the credit-and-finance business. At present he was regional manager for a credit-reporting firm.

We caught up on each other's lives for a few minutes and I asked him for a favor.

"Wait one," he said. "Everything's computerized now. Let me push some buttons and see what pops up on the genie's green screen."

I took down the information and arranged lunch for next Wednesday. If he was the same old Mark, he'd order the low-cal special to hedge against the dry martinis.

I stared at my notepad, absorbing what he'd told me. It was afternoon

coffee time before I made a decision. I called Marlene and asked her not to hold dinner.

Lon Michaels was obviously surprised to see me.

"I thought I'd take you up on your offer," I said. "You're right. The old neighborhood is just the same, except for the people and the paint schemes."

"Come on in," he said reluctantly. "The place is a mess. You know how bachelor pads are."

"Mess" was an understatement. The living room smelled of stale beer and vaguely of cats. Empty beer bottles were scattered everywhere. A stack of fossilized TV-dinner trays rested on an end table. A color television provided the only illumination in the room. The set pulsed with the hot, frenetic color of a game show. The host was babbling behind sparkling white teeth, a small card cupped in his hand. An obese woman with heavy makeup bobbed up and down, shrieking either with ecstasy or crushing disappointment. Lon shut it off before I could determine which. He flicked on a light and gestured to a chair. He was drunk—blotto. I didn't remember him being so messy.

I scanned the room. Same furniture. The same wall hangings too.

Lon got me a beer. "This really brings it back," I said. "The Three Musketeers. Whatever."

Lon nodded and stared at his bottle. It was difficult to converse with a zombie, so I asked him for the grand tour.

"With my hours at the store I don't have the time to keep it as clean as it should be," he said in half apology. "I should hire me a maid, I guess."

I told him it didn't matter. We skimmed the house and walked into the garage. "Your dad had his darkroom out here, didn't he?" I said.

"Yeah, but I never got into that. It's storage space now."

So was the remainder of the garage—flotsam from today and yesteryear was piled to the rafters. I noticed the concrete birdbath with the cherub base. "Déjà vu," I said. "Wasn't this stuff tacky? But it sure was the rage." "I ought to get rid of it, but I hate to," Lon slurred. "Sentimental value."

I noticed one of the flamingos propped against a rusty Schwinn. It was pink.

"There were two," I said. "Where's the other one?"

"No, Dave, there was only one. I'd know."

I noticed a steel rod behind the flamingo, a chunk of plaster stuck to one end. The garage lacked the moldy, decaying odor of the main house. The floor was spotless and smelled of cleansers.

"How's business?" I asked.

"Couldn't be better." He had opened another beer. His arm was propped on the handle of an ancient push mower.

I blurted out that his business was *not* good. According to Mark Hayes's records, creditors hovered over his store like vultures. A few weeks ago he had paid some of them off, but it was too little, too late.

He looked at me evenly and said, "I had to move to that new mall. The rent was killing me, but I had to follow the trade. Then that chain operation came along. It's tooth and nail."

"Is that why you borrowed twenty grand from Jimmy Gardner?"

He nodded. "I intended to pay him off, Dave, but I needed more time. I'd signed over the house as collateral and he said he was going to foreclose. I never thought he would. God knows, when I signed that piece of paper with him he was my last hope. My credit around town isn't worth a nickel. I thought it would be O.K. if I got into a bind—that Jimmy would give me some slack. Hell, I hardly even read what I signed. All for one and one for all. But it wasn't the same old Jimmy. All he cared about was money."

I picked up the steel flamingo leg.

"We were out here," Lon said. "We got into a big argument. I guess I lost my head. I grabbed what was handy."

"It wasn't the store, Dave. It was the house. I've never lived anywhere else, except when I was a baby. I reminded him about The Three Musketeers and how we vowed to stick together. All he did was laugh. I guess that's when I went crazy."

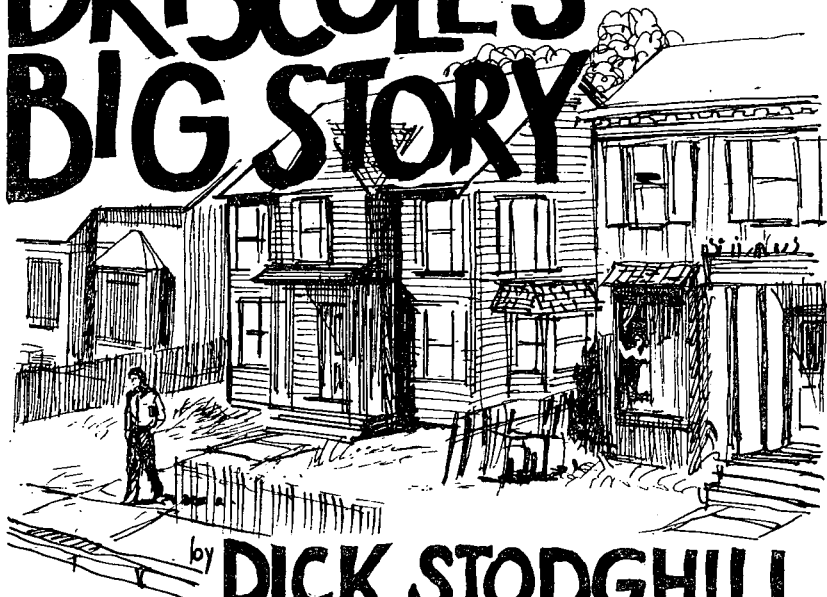
"We have to make a phone call," I said. "The sooner we do, the better it'll be for you."

"I know," Lon said. "But can we have a beer first? Talk for a while? God knows when we will again."

I said we could do that. Lon opened the door and I followed him inside.

The big things are what people see in a murder . . .

DRISCOLL'S BIG STORY



by **DICK STODGHILL**

After hearing Driscoll's story I regret having asked whether he knew of anything exciting in the offing. It wasn't exciting, merely depressing. Nevertheless I'll use it.

Column material has been scarce so it isn't a time to be choosy. I'd prefer something light and upbeat, but will settle for a human-interest item. It will appear on Monday, the day the trial begins, so the judge

and the prosecutor will be displeased. However, that's less distasteful than the alternative, which is having my editor displeased.

And so I drive to the house on Proud Street. It's an old two-story that's already showing signs of neglect. There's a sinister aura that comes over a house after a tragedy has occurred within its walls. Of course, that may be more in the mind than in the eyes of the beholder.

Proud Street no longer lives up to its name. In the boom years following the Second World War it was overtaken by commercialism. First a large shopping center was built nearby and then came spot-zoning. One by one, fine old homes were chopped up to create as many apartments as their absentee owners could squeeze in. Walls of thin plywood turned spacious rooms into cramped cells. Repairs were made only in dire emergencies and with each turnover in tenants the neighborhood decreased in desirability. Eventually the city fathers began to wonder what had brought on urban blight.

The Endicott house stands near the middle of a block. The lots are small and the houses big. A few are well cared for, but most look like refugees from an Army street-fighting course.

Marie Endicott was shot to death in an upstairs bedroom of the Endicott house on a Friday evening in March. On Monday her husband, Ken, goes on trial for first-degree murder.

Marie, who worked in a bank, had filed for a divorce, so they were living apart. At her request, Ken returned to repair the automatic washer. Their two daughters, ten and twelve, had left to spend the weekend with their grandmother before their father arrived.

The daughters will be the focal point of my column. A moment of anger and one life is ended, others torn apart. The sort of thing once referred to as a sob-sister piece by newsmen. Not my favorite way of filling space, yet I know it will be well received. I may not like it, but selling newspapers is my job.

Marie Endicott's body was discovered on the morning after her death by her boss, Palmer Tryon. She normally didn't work on Saturday but she had agreed to help him with a project. When she failed to show up or answer her phone, Tryon drove to the house, entered, and found the body.

The gun belonged to Ken Endicott. It was kept in the drawer of a nightstand just inside their bedroom door. The drawer was partially open.

The gun, wiped free of fingerprints, was on the floor near the table about ten feet from the body.

A neighbor, Luella Peck, told the police she saw the defendant leave the house shortly before she and her husband went out to a movie. The pathologist fixed the time of death as 8:30 P.M., give or take an hour. The Pecks had left for the movie at eight o'clock.

Ken Endicott claimed that after repairing the washer he drove to his rooming house and didn't leave again until the police arrived at noon the next day. He denied killing Marie but no one believed him.

The trial begins routinely on Monday. Driscoll's first story is nothing but a rehash of the shooting and the start of jury selection. The copy he files just before the noon deadline Tuesday says little other than that the jury was seated late in the morning. Jake Richards, the *News-Banner* city editor, shakes his head and says, "Pretty dull stuff, Grady."

"Damn it, Jake, I just report the news, I don't make it happen," Driscoll replies in an aggrieved tone. It's a declaration he makes at least once a week. I smile and he catches it.

"What's so funny, big-shot?" he snarls. Driscoll is aware that Monday's "Around Town with Hal Blinn" was a success and that he furnished most of the material. I hand him a note I'd made on a humorous story. He reads it and is mollified.

The drought of material has ended for me. I've gathered enough to last me the rest of the week. After a bowl of chili at Horner's Tavern I accompany Driscoll to the courthouse to hear the opening testimony. That's one advantage of writing a daily column—you're free to wander about at will.

The first witness is Palmer Tryon. The prosecutor, Jeff Mothersbaugh, intends to impress the jury with a dramatic opening. After the preliminaries he asks, "Why was Mrs. Endicott going to work that Saturday?"

"I was in charge of a promotional campaign. There was a lot to do before Monday morning and she agreed to help."

"But she didn't arrive?"

Tryon shakes his head in reply. Judge Otis Main purses his lips. "Answer the question," he says testily. "The recorder doesn't pick up head-shaking." I make a note of it.

"No," Tryon murmurs, embarrassed.

"So what did you do?"

"I called my—I called her house."

"And?"

"There was no answer. I tried several more times and then decided to go over."

"Did you suspect anything was wrong?"

Tryon chews his lower lip. "Well, I don't know. It wasn't like her not to show up without calling."

"So you went to her house. Go on."

"I knocked, but there was no answer. The door was unlocked so I went inside and called her name."

"Continue. Tell the jury what you did."

"I walked through the house calling her name and then I went upstairs."

"And what did you find?"

"Her bedroom door was open and I saw—I looked in and saw her body."

"You say 'body.' Did you know she was dead?"

"There was blood. I—I *didn't* know, but I thought she was."

"Tell the jury exactly what you saw."

"She was lying on her side. She only had on her"—Tryon clears his throat self-consciously—"her bra and underpants. Then I saw the gun."

"Where was it?"

"On the floor just inside the door."

After more routine questions it is Murray Townsend's turn. He's chief public defender and, while soft-spoken and mild-mannered, he has a way of making witnesses squirm. Tryon does when he asks, "Why did you choose Mrs. Endicott to help you?"

"Well—she had helped me before."

"On Saturday mornings?"

Tryon nods, remembers in time, and says, "Yes."

"Would you and she be alone in the bank?"

"Uh—usually."

"Did she get paid overtime?"

"Well, no," Tryon said reluctantly. "The bank doesn't make provision for that but—well—I'd see she was compensated in other ways." There is snickering and Tryon blushes. "I mean, I would see that she got time off to make up for it."

Townsend smiles knowingly. "Did anyone else ever help you on Saturday mornings?"

"Uh—no."

"How did you know where Mrs. Endicott's bedroom was located?"

Mothersbaugh is out of his chair like a shot. "Your Honor, that question is out of order!"

Judge Main scowls at him. "He said her bedroom door was open." He turns to Tryon and adds, "Answer the question."

"I didn't know where it was. I just looked in the room and saw her."

Townsend's knowing smile reappears as he scans the jurors' faces. He looks back at Tryon and says, "When you testified that you called Mrs. Endicott you started by saying, 'I called my—' You called your *what*?"

Tryon is flustered, doesn't know how to answer. "You called your what?" repeats Townsend.

Tryon inhales deeply, then blurts, "My wife."

"You called your wife?"

"Yes."

"Before you called Marie Endicott?"

"Yes. No—afterward."

"Which was it?"

"Afterward."

"Why did you call your wife?"

"I wanted her to go over there. We live just on the other side of the shopping center."

"But she didn't go?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I guess—she was busy."

"Did she know Marie Endicott?"

"Yes."

"Did she like her?"

Tryon flushes again and Mothersbaugh objects. The objection is sustained.

"So you went yourself?"

"Yes."

"And your wife knew you were going?"

"Your Honor—" Mothersbaugh begins, but slumps back in his chair when the judge glares at him.

"Yes, she knew I was going," Tryon says.

"Then if someone told her they saw you entering Marie Endicott's house she wouldn't have thought anything of—"

Mothersbaugh is out of his chair, shouting. "Your Honor, I object to this entire line of questioning! It's—"

"Sustained."

Townsend smiles at the jurors, gives a little shrug, and goes back to his chair. Tryon hurries from the courtroom, mopping his brow.

Driscoll and I look at each other. Townsend's only prayer is to establish doubt. In effect he has been saying to the jurors: "See, the great State of Indiana may not be telling all."

The next witness is Luella Peck, the neighbor. She's a wizened scarecrow of a woman. Mothersbaugh is handling it well; he has Marie Endicott dead and now the Peck woman's testimony places Mrs. Endicott's estranged husband at the scene. The pathologist will make his visit fall into the time period of the murder. Mothersbaugh will have everything neatly tied together while the jurors are still attentive. Later he will bore them with monotonous police testimony.

Luella Peck rises to leave as Mothersbaugh turns away. She is only half out of the witness chair when Murray Townsend says, "Just a minute, if you don't mind." She remains poised, giving him a nasty look, then sinks back down. He advances with an expression of innocence that means trouble for her. At the very least he'll want to give the jurors the impression she keeps a battery of telescopes trained on the houses of her neighbors.

Already Luella Peck despises him and he hasn't even asked his first question. When he says, "How can you be sure Mr. Endicott left his house precisely at eight o'clock?" she replies vehemently, "It wasn't his house any more!" and looks around the courtroom for approval. After savoring her triumph she goes on. "I already told you—my husband and I left right after he did so we could catch the eight-twenty feature at the Tivoli."

"Was he in a hurry?" Townsend asks. "Did he run out of the house?"

"Of course not. That would have looked suspicious."

Townsend smiles wryly at the jurors, raising his eyebrows. Luella Peck is leaving little doubt that she is out to get his client, and Townsend is delighted. "Did he look around furtively or anything like that?" he presses on.

Luella Peck snorts loudly. "No, for heaven's sake! That would have been a dead giveaway."

Townsend smiles again and Mothersbaugh shifts uncomfortably. He is itching to ask the judge to order her merely to answer the questions, but is hesitant to do so with his own witness.

"So he just walked casually to his car?"

"Yes."

"Was he carrying anything?"

"No."

"He had nothing at all in his hands?"

Luella Peck sits quietly for a moment, frowning. At last she concedes, "Well, not the first time."

"The *first* time?" Townsend's eyebrows shoot up again, but I can see he's not surprised. I look at Mothersbaugh. He is.

Without waiting to be asked, Luella Peck says, "He went back inside for a minute. When he came out again he had a little black box."

Mothersbaugh whispers to Greg Staley, the police detective seated with him at the table. Staley shakes his head and shrugs.

Townsend gives Luella Peck an exaggerated look of disapproval. "You didn't mention previously that Mr. Endicott went back inside."

She draws herself up. "I forgot. It wasn't important."

Townsend says, "What did he do when he came out the second time?"

"Got in his car and drove away."

"How long was he inside the second time?"

"I said a minute. Well, maybe two or three."

"Then he drove away with the little black box?"

"Yes."

Townsend smiles ingratiatingly, thanks her, and sits down. He has managed to inject a little mystery into the proceedings. Mothersbaugh asks her about the black box on redirect, but only makes it more intriguing.

The final witness of the afternoon is Fred Shuman. He testifies that Marie Endicott was to meet him at a tavern on the evening of her death but didn't show up and that he drove by her house at ten o'clock, but there were no lights so he kept going. On cross-examination he says it would have been their second date.

After leaving the courtroom I walk down the corridor to where Driscoll has cornered Murray Townsend. As I approach, Driscoll is asking, "So what was the little black box?"

"Will you keep it under your hat?"

Driscoll says, "The box or your answer?"

Townsend shakes his head, grimacing. "O.K., but it's off the record. It was a pocket transistor radio. He didn't have one in his room and he asked Marie for this one. A man wouldn't murder his wife and then go back into the house for something like that, would he? Or go back in for it and just shoot her in passing?"

I feel sorry for him. An attorney is in trouble when an assumption like that is a key point of his defense.

Driscoll and I stroll back to Horner's, which good fortune has placed on a corner midway between the courthouse and the *News-Banner* office. We ease quietly past the stool where Jake Richards is sitting and go on to the back room.

Gloria Thompson, who covers the school beat, sits alone at a table, so we join her. Gloria is cute in a hard-boiled way. Driscoll tells her about the trial. When he finishes she grins and says, "The husband didn't do it."

Driscoll frowns at her. "Why do you say that?" he asks.

"Because a woman who kicks her husband out and files for divorce wouldn't parade around in front of him in her underwear."

We wait for more, but nothing comes. Finally Driscoll and I laugh. He says, "That's ridiculous. In the first place, she wasn't parading around. She was in her bedroom getting ready to go out for the evening."

"With another man, right?" Gloria retorts. "All the more reason. Under the circumstances an estranged husband is the last person in the world she'd let see her that way."

I laugh again and say, "Gloria, you've never been married, how would you know?"

"I'm a woman."

Driscoll picks up his beer irritably and walks out front. I wink at Gloria, give her arm a little squeeze, and follow him.

He has edged up to the bar next to Jake, but Jake pretends he doesn't know he's there. After a few seconds Driscoll taps his shoulder and says, "Jake, would a woman separated from her husband walk around in front of him in her underwear?"

Jake turns a little and fixes his watery grey eyes on Driscoll. His upper

lip curls. A moment goes by. Then he says, "Grady, you're really getting weird."

Driscoll whirls around and stalks out the door. I return to the back room and try to convince Gloria that we could drink less expensively at my apartment. She doesn't agree.

When Driscoll leaves for the courthouse on Wednesday morning, I tag along. We run into Murray Townsend in the corridor and Driscoll repeats Gloria's theory, expecting him to laugh. Instead he looks thoughtful and says, "It's not a bad point. I may use it in my closing argument."

Driscoll peers at him, wondering if he is kidding. When he realizes Townsend is serious he turns to me and says, "Great, isn't it? Between that and the little black box, Endicott has nothing to worry about."

At that moment Ken Endicott walks by, escorted on one side by a deputy and on the other by a dyed redhead clinging to his arm. The three of us watch until they enter the courtroom, then Driscoll and I look at Townsend. He's scowling. "Who's the woman?" I ask.

"Damn it, I told her to stay away from him," Townsend says, more to himself than us. "That looks bad to the jurors. They'll think he had another one all lined up."

"Who is she?" I repeat.

"Juanita Colson. An old girl friend who sees herself as the new girl friend. I'm beginning to think Endicott does too, since she's the only one who offered him a shoulder to cry on when Marie filed for divorce."

"Were they dating?"

"They had dinner once or twice. Nothing serious—at least on Endicott's part."

We follow them into the courtroom, but the testimony is boring and I leave soon. Late in the afternoon I run into Driscoll in the back room at Horner's. "How did it go today?" I ask.

He shrugs his shoulders and doesn't answer for a minute. Then he says, "I've been thinking." I make a smart remark but he ignores it and says, "Suppose Endicott didn't do it?"

"Then who did?"

"Palmer Tryon, maybe. It doesn't take a dirty mind to figure he was thinking about more than business with Marie. Or how about Fred Shuman, the new boy friend?"

I shake my head. "It wasn't a passionate attack, so I'd strike Shuman. And why would Tryon kill her?"

"I don't know. O.K., how about a woman?"

"Who, Luella Peck?" I laugh.

"How about the Colson woman? Or Tryon's wife, Ilka. Why wouldn't she go over to the Endicott house? Did you notice that Tryon wasn't going to say anything about calling her?"

"He probably didn't see any importance to it."

"There's Martha Kanaday, the grandmother."

"Now you're being ridiculous! Another thing—who would have known the gun was kept in the bedside table other than Endicott?"

Driscoll has no answer, so he doesn't say anything more for a few minutes. Then he looks at his watch, finishes the beer in his glass, and gets up. "I've got to meet Greg Staley. He's taking me out to the Endicott house."

"For what?"

"I just want to see the inside—add a little color to my coverage."

That isn't the reason and I know it. Driscoll is playing detective again. He once uncovered information that was instrumental in solving a case and now he sees himself as another Sherlock Holmes. More often than not he's 180 degrees out of phase with reality. Still, I'm curious and say, "I'll go along" although I know Driscoll isn't keen on having company. We work for the same paper, but he looks on me as a competitor, which in a sense is true.

Greg Staley is the closest thing Driscoll has to a friend in the police department. We drive the half mile to Proud Street in his unmarked car. The house has been sealed since shortly after the murder and as we enter the side door we're hit by a stench that makes me wonder why I left the comfort of Horner's. I breathe through my mouth and walk up three steps to the kitchen.

The odor comes from spoiled food in the refrigerator. It has been unplugged and left standing open. Other than that, the kitchen looks much as it did the night of the murder. Dirty dishes remain on three sides of the table. More are in the sink. Two lunch boxes are on the counter and a note sticks out from under one. I pick it up and read: "Mom, I have to have a dollar Monday for a notebook. Don't forget. Janie."

My column hits home with a vengeance, right in the pit of my stomach. The big things are what people see in a murder; the little ones pass unnoticed. But those who do notice are marked by what they see, the pitiful reminders of how it once was but will never be again. An uncleared supper table, mouldering food, a note that went unheeded, lunch boxes that won't be packed for another routine day because, for that routine, time has run out.

When Driscoll and Staley go upstairs, I follow along. The bedroom hasn't changed much either. The gun and the body are gone but a dark stain on the beige carpet shows where the one had been. Here too the little things make the deepest impression—a container of blue eye shadow standing open on a vanity, beside it an uncapped bottle of nailpolish, now hardened. Across a corner of the bed is a pale-blue dress on which dust has settled.

Driscoll is busy with his detection, bustling about, pulling out drawers, and opening closets. Staley watches condescendingly. I look too as Driscoll explores the drawer of the bedside table. It contains nothing but an electric razor without a cord, a small flashlight, and a wristwatch with only half a strap.

He goes on to the other rooms but I settle for watching him from the hallway until he lifts the lid on a wicker clothes hamper in the bathroom. I walk up beside him and see it's empty.

Staley and I trail behind when Driscoll heads for the basement. Several patterned dresses and pastel blouses hang from a clothesline. The washer is empty but a dozen pairs of girls' kneesocks are in the dryer. Driscoll closes the lid on the washer and pushes the start button. It rumbles and water begins surging in.

"Why the devil did you do that?" Staley growls.

"Just curious," Driscoll answers. "I want to go back upstairs for a minute." Staley looks pointedly at his watch, but we follow behind again.

Driscoll goes first to the girls' room, opens drawers, and reaffirms that they are empty. He hurries on to Marie's bedroom, does the same, and verifies that the dresser contains only clean things. I save him the trouble of opening the closet door again. There are five white blouses on hangers. Driscoll gives me a knowing look.

On the way back downtown, Staley says, "I see what you were driving at back there but it doesn't mean a thing. Maybe she did some of the

wash the night before and then the machine broke down so she called Endicott and he fixed it."

Driscoll shakes his head. "Then why no dirty clothes in the hamper? Are you trying to tell me three people didn't take off any dirty clothes in twenty-four hours?"

"Maybe the grandmother washed them when she picked up the girls' clothes."

Driscoll snorts disbelievingly. "Sure, then hung up her daughter's blouses in the room where she was murdered and walked out with the girls' socks still in the dryer. Fat chance."

Staley doesn't answer. A minute later he drops us off at Horner's. Driscoll goes straight to the phone and calls Martha Kanaday, the grandmother. When he comes back to the table where I'm sitting he has a smug look on his face. "She didn't do any washing—never even went down into the basement."

"So what?"

"So Marie Endicott was washing clothes after her husband left."

It does seem reasonable, I admit to myself. I'm weary of the subject, though, and leave after one beer.

I learn from Driscoll's Thursday story that the State has rested its case. In the evening he tells me Endicott will take the stand on Friday morning and the jury should begin its deliberation by mid-afternoon. He slams his fist down on one of Horner's round tables and says, "Damn it, Hal, I don't think he did it."

I've had a good dinner and several beers so my mood is mellower than the night before. He wants to talk, so I say, "Run down the other possibilities again."

He ticks them off on his fingers. "Scratch Martha Kanaday and Luella Peck. That leaves Juanita Colson, Fred Shuman, Palmer Tryon, and Ilka Tryon."

"Or a party or parties unknown. It could have been a burglar."

"No, it couldn't. It was someone she knew. You know why? Because Marie Endicott got up from the vanity, but didn't bother to reach for the dress to hold in front of her."

There is logic in what he says. "Of course," I say, "it could have been an unknown party to us but someone she knew. Anyway, cross Fred Shuman and Juanita Colson off your list."

Driscoll scowls. "I agree on Shuman, he doesn't fit. But why the girl friend?"

"Because Marie was doing exactly what Juanita wanted—getting a divorce. Why kill her?"

He sees my point, but grudgingly. "That only leaves Palmer and Ilka Tryon," he says, and then goes into a funk. After a couple of minutes his face lights up. "I think it was Ilka."

"Why, for God's sake? You've never even seen the woman, have you?"

He shakes his head but hurries on. "Suppose she suspected something was going on between Marie Endicott and her husband. She found out they were planning another of their Saturday-morning get-togethers, so she goes over and confronts Marie. Or say she and Palmer fight about it, he goes out, she assumes he went to see Marie, and goes there herself. She walks in, figuring to catch them in the act, but he isn't there and Marie gets mad or maybe laughs at her so Ilka blows her stack."

"And then what?" I ask him. "Does she say, 'I want to shoot you—where do you keep your gun?'"

Driscoll's face falls. "Yeah, how would she know where the gun was?" He brightens suddenly and says, "Maybe Marie got it out while they were arguing and Ilka took it away from her."

I shake my head. "There was no sign of a struggle, and the shot was fired from a distance."

He sits disconsolately for a minute, then mumbles, "I still bet she did it."

Ken Endicott's testimony is something I don't want to miss, so I arrive at the courtroom early Friday morning. Endicott hasn't been getting enough nourishment and his sandy hair looks dull and sparse. His brown eyes have a harried look, but for a man standing close to a life sentence he could look worse. Murray Townsend leads him through the night of the murder. Endicott says fixing the washer turned out to be an easy job.

"What did you do when it was working again?" asks Townsend.

"Marie put in a load of things, then she went upstairs. I watched it through the cycle to make sure it worked O.K. Then I left."

"You went out to your car?"

"Yes."

"And then what did you do?"

"I remembered something and went back inside."

"What was it you remembered?"

Not even the sound of breathing disturbs the silence. This is the moment everyone has been waiting for.

"I remembered my transistor radio. I didn't have one in my room and I knew this one wasn't being used."

"Did you get it?"

"Marie got it for me."

"From where?"

"The drawer of the night stand beside the bed."

"Did you go upstairs with her?"

"No, I told her where it was and she brought it down to me."

"Then what did you do?"

"I left. I bought a battery for it and went back to my room."

Anticlimactic sighs and a few whispers rise from the spectators. They're disappointed, but when I look at Driscoll I see he's excited. When I leave a few minutes later, he gets up and follows me out.

"That's it!" he exclaims. "It was Ilka, all right. Marie was in a hurry when she got the radio and didn't bother to close the drawer all the way. While they were arguing Ilka looked down, saw the gun, and picked it up. That completes the picture."

"It completes nothing, Grady," I warn him. "Talk that way to other people and you'll end up in court yourself."

I avoid Horner's at lunchtime because I don't want to get in an argument with him. He finds me eating a breaded tenderloin at the Backstage Bar. "I'm going out to her house," he says. "I'm going to confront her with it." Of course I know what he's talking about but I pretend I don't, or that I'm not interested.

When he sees I'm not going to say anything he gets up again and starts for the door. I throw my sandwich down on the plate and call, "You can't do that, Grady!" He doesn't acknowledge me so I go after him.

He won't be swayed. I can't credit him with possessing common sense but he does have the courage of his convictions. I decide I'd better go with him and hope I can find a way to keep him out of jail.

My first look at Ilka Tryon comes when she opens her front door. Her appearance shocks me. She is far too thin, so her waxy skin clings to the bones of her face. Round dark eyes emphasize her death's-head look. Still, in a mysterious, exotic way, she's attractive.

As we enter the living room I notice a vodka bottle and a half-empty glass beside it. Has guilt made her a midday drinker, I wonder, and can see that Driscoll is wondering the same thing.

On the drive to the Tryon house I had tried to temper his determination with caution and believed I had succeeded. When he sees she has been drinking, my work comes unglued. He charges ahead, surprising even me with his bluntness when he says, "Mrs. Tryon, I know what happened in the house on Proud Street the night Marie Endicott died."

While his words stun me, Ilka Tryon's reaction leaves me transfixed. She springs at Driscoll like a tigress protecting her lair. Taking an ex-Marine off his feet isn't easy, especially for a woman spotting him close to a hundred pounds, but she does it. They hit the floor with her on top.

I stand there a moment, unable to react, watching Driscoll trying to grab her clawing fingers. Finally I move, but before I reach them Driscoll launches a solid right that connects with her jaw. She jerks back, then slumps over on her right side, out cold. It has all happened too fast for me. Driscoll sits up, breathing heavily. His face is a mess. He stares at the unconscious woman. "You see?" he says. "I was right."

I walk to the phone and dial the police. Luckily Greg Staley has stopped at headquarters after lunch. "Driscoll just kayoed Mrs. Tryon," I tell him.

A long pause, then a disbelieving, "He *what*?"

"You heard me—he decked Mrs. Tryon. Don't waste time, get out here before she comes to." I give him the address on Dicks Street.

"I shouldn't have done it," Ilka tells Staley. "But he looked so helpless standing there, and when he begged me, well—"

"What are you—" Driscoll manages before Staley tells him to shut up.

"I followed him," she goes on. "I had known for some time that something was going on between them. Of course, Palmer didn't know that. When I overheard him on the telephone, pleading with her—well, I knew he was upset, so when he went out I followed him. I'd just walked up on the porch when I heard the shot. I knew what I should do, but—"

She looks at each of us again, still hoping we'll understand. Then, more forcefully, she says, "The one thing I wouldn't do was go back there the next morning and pretend I found the body."

Two other detectives and a policewoman have arrived. They leave Ilka Tryon with the policewoman and head for the bank. Driscoll and I are close behind.

Palmer Tryon crumples as soon as he sees them. Staley reads him his rights, but Tryon insists on telling the story. He had wanted to break it off, but Marie demanded that he live up to their agreement and file for a divorce—otherwise she'd tell everything. Not only to Ilka but at the bank. They aren't too happy about things like that at banks.

He had planned to plead with her again on Saturday morning, but before she left the bank on Friday she told him she wouldn't be there. He was desperate so he called her that evening, didn't get anywhere, and went to her house. He begged, but Marie laughed. He saw the gun and—well, everyone knew the rest.

Jake Richards frowns as he hears the story. He looks at the clock and says, "Damn it, Grady, why did you do it on *Morning Sun* time? Now they'll have the first story."

"So what?" Driscoll laughs. "They may have the first, but I'll have the best."

Jake scowls at him. "You will? Grady, you're not writing any first-person story." I haven't said a word, but Jake glares at me and growls, "Neither are you!"

So Gloria Thompson writes it. It's across the top of page one on Saturday with her byline. I feel sorry for Driscoll. His biggest story, and he doesn't even get co-billing. Of course, Driscoll will be the hero of my Monday column, but it's not the same.

The whole sordid business has left me depressed. I try to busy myself with other things but my mind keeps going back to it. Finally I call Driscoll and offer to buy him a drink.

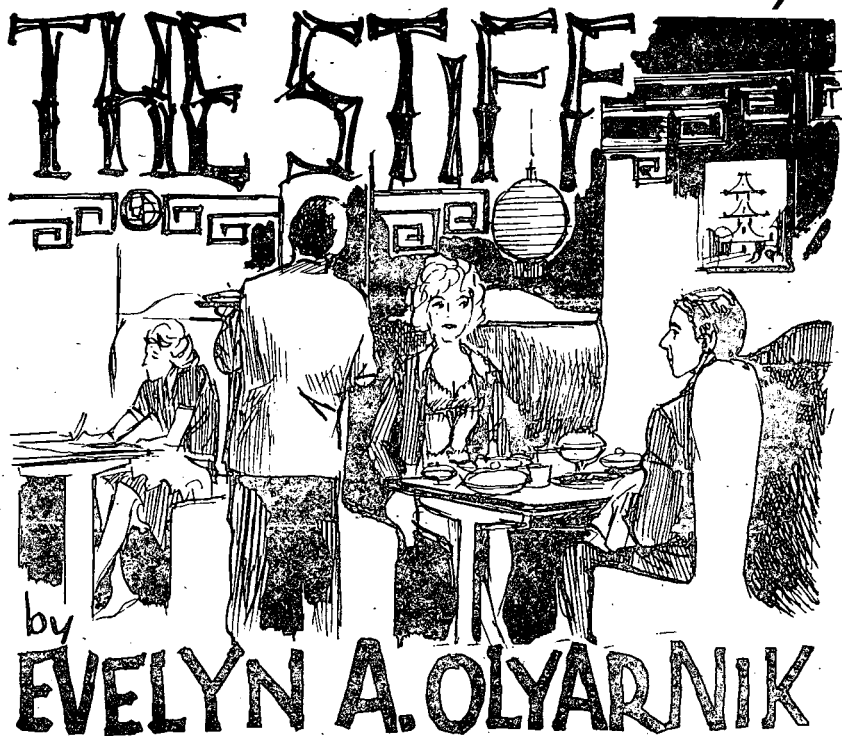
We meet at the Backstage Bar. I expect him to be in a foul mood, but he isn't. His cheerfulness irritates me, so after a few minutes of it I say, "You didn't get much satisfaction out of this Endicott business, did you?"

"Not much satisfaction?" he says. "Did you see those lunch boxes in the kitchen, and the note? Those little girls lost their mother, but at least they've got their father back."

He's right, of course. I buy him another drink. A little later Greg Staley comes in and buys us both one. He stares at Driscoll. "I just can't figure it, Grady," he says. "How'd you know it was Palmer Tryon?"

Driscoll tosses down his drink, then shrugs. "I thought it was pretty obvious right from the start."

Monday nights were dead at Chan's Restaurant . . .



Chinese restaurants were once considered romantic and inexpensive. In the movies of the Thirties and Forties, young couples, short of cash, always had an ample meal in the neighborhood Chinese restaurant. A Chinese dinner may still be romantic, but prices have gone up considerably. For everything except the pay. I know. I'm a waitress in Chan's Chinese Restaurant.

The owner, Ming Chan, is not overly generous with a buck, so we have

to make it on tips. The townspeople call the owner "Charlie" and the joint is unofficially known as Charlie Chan's. The restaurant has been in operation for about thirty years at the same location on the east side of town in an old, old building beneath a railroad overpass. Mr. Chan doesn't think much of decor and style and the restaurant is not lavishly decorated. In fact, it's rather plain and ugly. A garish orange, pink, and green neon sign out front advertises CHAN'S CHINESE RESTAURANT—CANTONESE AND AMERICAN FOOD.

The food is good and the restaurant, though not posh and classy, does a fair business, except on Mondays. Mondays are slow, and this Monday was no exception.

After a slight dinner rush, no customers came in for over an hour. Lui, the Chinese waiter, and I prepared for a long night. He filled the sugar bowls and brought out another pan of sweet sauce for the egg rolls. Lui was smart. That meant I'd have to make the hot mustard. I hate mixing the powdered yellow mustard with water. Why people enjoy this stuff on their food I'll never know. My eyes were tearing and I began mixing faster, trying to get it over with, when two people entered the restaurant: a woman far too old to be wearing the scanty spangled costume she sported under an open jacket and a face made up like the Fourth of July followed by a hatchet-faced man in his mid-thirties.

The man was a regular. He came in once a week by himself and ordered the cheapest meal on the menu. Lui and I knew him—he never tipped. I was glad it was Lui's turn. He banged the teacups and saucers around while he set up the table in the booth, and when he ordered their dinner for two and a steak I heard the cooks muttering some choice words in Chinese. Lui's only chance for a tip from this party was if the man wanted to impress his date or if she paid. It looked doubtful.

Lui served the food and went to the kitchen to watch the cooks playing mahjong. They had a long night ahead of them too. I sat down at one of the empty tables near the cash register with the evening newspaper. After reading the most interesting sections first—Dear Abby, the funnies, and the pet-care column—I started to work the crossword puzzle.

About ten words later the kitchen door swung open, squeaking on its rusty hinges, and Lui returned to check on his customers. He placed the bill on the table along with a plate bearing two fortune cookies and went back into the kitchen.

I was rolling along, getting the easy blanks on the puzzle filled in, and

had just finished a four-letter word for grain—r-i-c-e—when the phone rang in the pagoda-shaped phone booth across the room. I took my pencil with me, expecting to write down a take-out order, but it was only a man wanting to know if Chan's accepted credit cards. No Mr. Chan only accepted cash.

I made my way back to my newspaper. As I passed the booth where our only customers sat I thought I heard the man groan. Figuring he'd just looked at the bill, I didn't glance in his direction in case he wanted to complain. I sat down, folded the newspaper, and gazed thoughtfully at the half-empty soy-sauce bottle on the table when the least-dressed woman of the year walked across the floor toward the ladies' room. Her high-heeled shoes tapped smartly on the green-and-red tiled floor.

She didn't linger. It wasn't long before I heard her tapping back to the booth.

Then she screamed, a terrible, shrill yell that pierced the air and sent shivers racing along my arms. I sat frozen for a fraction of a second, not wanting to face whatever had made her scream. Had she seen a mouse or worse yet, spotted a cockroach? I forced myself to go and find out.

She stood staring into the booth. I looked in the direction of her stare. Her date was slumped in the seat with his right hand curved around the handle of the steak knife, the rest of which was plunged far into the left side of his chest where his heart used to beat. He looked very still—very dead.

I ran to the kitchen. "Lui!" I shouted. "There's a stiff in your booth!"

Lui eyed me coolly. "Yeah, he's a stiff. All the time same thing. Never tip nobody."

"You don't understand!" I began again. "He's dead! The man's dead!" The lack of enthusiasm on Lui's face told me I'd erred again. "Stiff" and "dead" mean the same in restaurant lingo. In desperation, I raced to the phone and dialed.

A woman answered in a bored tone. "Yellow Cab." In this town the cab company and the police-emergency number both begin with 321 and in my panic I'd called the cab company.

I slammed down the receiver, took a deep breath to calm myself, and began again. The operator at the police switchboard sounded just as bored as the cab woman. She made me spell the name of the restaurant, give my own name, and repeat the address twice.

"How many bodies are there?" she asked. I suppose this sort of thing

was an everyday occurrence to her but it wasn't for me and I couldn't help feeling irritated.

I returned to the sobbing woman at the booth and tried to console her while we waited for the police. Luckily, no other customers had come in. The woman was mumbling, "Poor guy—I didn't even know his name—"

That figures, I thought cattily, then felt guilty. After all, the guy was probably just taking her out to dinner, so what did names matter? How long do you have to know a guy to share a pot of tea and a bowl of fried rice?

Lui came out of the kitchen, looked in the booth at the man and then at the woman. Talk about inscrutable. His face showed no emotion at all—no alarm, sadness, disgust, or pity. He didn't even look interested. Like he didn't care. Maybe he didn't. The dead guy had never left a tip for anyone as many times as he'd eaten here. I watched Lui fold his arms across his chest and stand mutely, a white linen napkin slung over the shoulder of his beige waiter's jacket. A chill spread slowly across my back. Was it possible he had killed the man?

No. The woman would've seen him.

But she went to the ladies' room, a nagging voice within me persisted.

But Lui hadn't come out of the kitchen after he'd given the customers the bill and the woman had been at the table then.

A half hour later, two uniformed policemen and a plainclothes detective arrived. I backed away from the booth but stayed close enough so I could hear and see everything. The detective wrote in a small notebook as the woman spoke.

"Name's La Rue. Miss La Rue," she emphasized. "I went in the john to powder my nose and when I came back he was like this." She motioned to the unmoving body in the booth and went on to explain about the guy having mentioned financial problems.

"Yeah," agreed the detective. "Times are tough. He probably just couldn't take it any more." He slapped his notebook shut. "I guess he figured on having a good meal before he did himself in," he added, peering at the remains of the steak dinner on the plate. "Imagine that—a suicide at Charlie Chan's."

Miss La Rue looked stronger now. She picked up the bill from the table and thrust it at me. "Let me take care of this," she said. She dug

into her purse and withdrew two twenties and a ten. I rang up the sale and brought her the change. Lui moved in a little closer, expectantly, but the woman stuffed it into her purse.

The front door opened and two men carrying a stretcher started in.

"Excuse me," Lui said, speaking for the first time. "I think man not suicide." His English had suddenly improved. "Man wouldn't use right hand to kill self with steak knife. He left-handed."

I scanned the man's left hand dangling limply beside his chair and looked back at his right hand still clutching the handle of the deadly steak knife. No rings or watches adorned either hand. How did Lui know the man was left-handed?

One of the cops eyed Lui respectfully. "Oh, he must be a regular customer. You've probably watched him eating. Is that right?" He examined Lui's face carefully.

Lui removed the white linen napkin from his shoulder and folded it carefully in his hands before he spoke. "Regular customer, yes," Lui said. "How he eat, I don't know. Don't care. But every time he pay check I watch. Every time I see him put all his change in left-side pocket with left hand. All the change. Every time. He never give me nothing."

Lui's observations may not have been much in a court of law, but they were enough to make everyone turn to gape at the woman. Some time during Lui's speech she had quit sobbing and began fiddling with the clasp on her purse. Her face had grown noticeably paler under the heavy layers of rouge. Mascara leaked from her eyelashes and made two black puddles in the sagging semicircles under her eyes. The lines in her face hardened as she looked around at us.

"What's the matter with all of you? You crazy?" She raked her fingers through a mass of curls above her right ear just as her purse opened wide and a man's wallet fell to the floor.

The detective reopened his notebook.

"Miss La Rue, is that his wallet?" he asked. "Were you trying to roll this guy?"

A laugh that turned into a snarl escaped from her scarlet lips. "Roll him—that's a laugh. That's *my* money in that wallet." She stopped to take a ragged breath. "The creep came into the joint where I work for about a month. Never bought a drink for anyone, just sat there watching. He was watching me dance, sure, but he was also watching me taking money from the register while I tended bar between numbers.

"He never said a word till tonight. Tonight he tells me I gotta split the take with him or he'll tell my boss."

"I've been taking a lot of dough, more than I get paid a week. I didn't want to split with anyone, but I tried to buy time and I told him I would. We came here to talk, and he orders the best meal in the house, then decides I should pay the check. He insulted my dancing, said old dames like me should know better. I never hated anyone like I hated him." She smiled a horrible smile. "Yeah, I stabbed him, then I wrapped his hand around the knife to try to make it look like he'd killed himself. How was I to know he was left-handed?"

The man was placed on the stretcher with the handle of the steak knife still protruding out of his chest. The attendants covered him with a sheet and carried him outside. As we watched the cops and Miss La Rue get into the police car, Lui smiled, the gold tooth in the front of his mouth gleaming. He cleared the table of the dirty dishes and went back to join the mahjong game in the kitchen.

I thought briefly of the money Miss La Rue was stealing from her employer—more than she was paid a week. I even turned to stare in the direction of Mr. Chan's old-fashioned cash register across the room. Then I remembered an Edward G. Robinson movie I'd watched on the late show about the Tongs and their gruesome hatchets and decided it wasn't worth it.

The dining room is without customers now, and I'm back at my puzzle. A four-letter word starting with "s" meaning to thrust or wound with a dagger. Sometimes these puzzles aren't easy. Three more hours till closing time. Maybe I'll get it by then. I don't enjoy working crossword puzzles, but they help pass the time. It looks like it's going to be another—excuse the expression—dead Monday.



*It was inevitable that pirates would start putting out counterfeit
Richie Clete records . . .*

ON DIFFERENT TRACKS



by
MICHAEL SCOTT CAIN

Richie was going over his royalty statements when I came in. Sitting crosslegged on the couch, a pile of papers on the cushion to his right, he frowned as he punched figures into his calculator. The scent of some expensive perfume hung lightly in the air. He must have chased a chick out just before he called me.

"What's up, Richie?" I said.

He held his hand out, signaling me to wait, and hit the total button.

The figure disgusted him and he snarled under his breath, tossing the calculator aside.

"Damn it, I can't catch them," he said. "I don't know how they're doing it."

"Let it go, Richie. The auditors couldn't find a thing in the company's books. They aren't cheating you."

"Yeah, well, I guess you'd feel that way."

I wasn't used to the tone in his voice. "What are you talking about?"

"Burt was down at Wildwood over the weekend, doing the games on the boardwalk."

That figured. Burt, Richie's keyboard player, was a freak for amusement parks. A pinball machine could transport him to heights he'd never hit with his synthesizers.

"So?"

"Guess what he won playing pinball?"

"What?"

"This." He held up an album. The cover showed Richie, decked out in New Wave finery, holding his guitar in a Chuck Berry machine-gun pose. The title, *Madman in Love*, ran across the top of the cover. Richie's name, in the same typeface, balanced the cover across the bottom.

"Terrific," I said. "I didn't know they were ready to ship yet. The company rush them or what?"

Richie tossed the album onto the floor. "They *haven't* shipped yet. The covers haven't even been printed."

"Then where'd they get that one?"

"It's a pirate!" Richie shouted. "They're all over the East Coast! By tomorrow they'll be nationwide. Somebody ripped off the album."

"Oh, no."

These days a new album by Richie Clete was a big deal. You know him. You've probably got a couple of his records in your stacks. For years he was just another journeyman rocker; every album he cut was a total stiff and he barely kept alive by staying out on the road all year long, building up a following. His label dropped him and when Jeff Weiss, his manager, tried to line up another deal he found nobody wanted Richie. It took a while, but Jeff finally got a new label deal. Richie hired a new producer, and with the first album for the new company lightning struck. Now his albums ship double platinum—he sells about 100,000 units a

day. With those figures, it was inevitable that pirates would start putting out counterfeit Richie Clete records.

I'd been with him from the beginning. He was my oldest friend in the world and when he went on the road I went with him as his sound man. I'm the guy you see in the back of the auditorium working a huge console. My job is to balance all the sounds coming out of those speakers and to compensate for lousy acoustics. If I'm not at the console, the guitars sound like cats scratching a post and the synthesizers sound like the death screams of a computer.

I also engineer the records. I enhance Richie's voice and keep the instruments sounding the way they're supposed to. When we're in the studio only two people touch the tapes we cut: Richie and me. That's why he was looking at me that way now.

"What do you figure happened, Carl?" he asked.

"Somebody at the label must be on the take. It wouldn't be the first time. Pirates have people in all the companies."

"I don't think it happened that way, Carl."

"Oh?"

"Even if they worked at top speed, going overtime around the clock, they'd need six weeks to get hold of the tapes, dupe them, master them, and press the records." He paused to let that sink in. "Where were the tapes six weeks ago, Carl?"

"At the mixing studio. We were polishing the mix."

"That's right. Under your supervision."

"Look, Richie, I wouldn't do a thing like that. We're friends, man. I wouldn't sell out a friend."

"I always *thought* we were friends, Carl. Now I'm not so sure."

"I'm telling you, Richie—I didn't do it."

"You're going to jail, Carl. And that's not all. I'm going to slap you with a lawsuit that'll have you spinning till you hit your grave."

"Listen, Richie—"

"Get out of here, man," he said. "You disgust me."

Once the word got out that Richie'd accused me of pirating, I'd be through in the business. Rock is a big-money game and when you're dealing with a product that has a multi-million-dollar potential you don't mess around with a man who's even been *accused* of dealing himself an extra hand. If I intended to stay in this business I had to find out what

was going down. I took a cab to June Ameling's mixing studio, Electric Juniper.

June was on the phone. She waved at me and spoke into the receiver. She was a tall woman and the spiked boots she liked to wear made her tower over regular-sized people like me. She'd been doing PR for one of the major labels and noticed that the bands had to go out of town to find a first-rate mixing studio. When her marriage went down the tubes she needed a challenge, so she opened Electric Juniper. It had been a hit from the first day.

June was all business: When you rented time from her, you showed up when you were supposed to and did your job. She wouldn't hold studios. The backlog was so great that if you were two hours late you found somebody else working at your console—she'd rerent your studio to the next person on the waiting list. Try not paying her—and you'd be surprised how many people in this business try not to pay—and she'd confiscate your tapes, holding them for ransom. She could afford to be autocratic because Electric Juniper was the best there was, a state-of-the-art studio all the way.

She told the record-company heavy on the phone that she didn't care how much he was going to make. "Make a billion for all I care but if you don't come up with the seventeen thousand you owe me you're going to have to make it without those tapes."

She hung up while the heavy was still telling her what his lawyers were going to do to her. Turning to me, she said, "How's it going, Carl?"

"Somebody ripped off Richie's new album."

Her face whitened. "From here?"

"I'm afraid so."

"You know, Larry split a while back." Larry was her engineer. He worked as assistant on our records. "No notice or anything. He just didn't show up one morning and he hasn't been in since."

"About six weeks ago?"

She checked her calendar. "Yeah."

"That's it then. Did he have access to the safe?"

"He wasn't supposed to, but he could have gotten hold of the combination. It's possible."

"You sound a little dubious."

"Every studio here has its own safe. I change the combinations with

each job. You know how carefully musicians guard those tapes. If my place isn't secure I'm out of the business."

"But still Larry disappeared at the same time our tapes did."

"Too strong for coincidence, isn't it?"

"I'll go by his place. If he shows up here, hold him for me, will you?"

I left June watching her studio's reputation go down the drain.

Larry didn't answer his door. I checked around and the super told me he hadn't seen him for a month or so. "Tell him if he wants his stuff," he said, "he can come up with the rent."

I told him I'd pass on the message and went home. A short barrel-bellied man waited by my door.

"You Carl Boswell?" He had big sad eyes.

"Yeah."

He followed me inside. I didn't resist.

"My name's Sherill. David Sherill." He flashed a badge. "I'm with the F.B.I."

"Richie called you guys in already?"

He looked puzzled. "Richie?"

"Richie Clete."

"Oh, the guy who made the record? No, the record company alerted us this morning. You work for Clete, don't you?"

We stood in the center of the living room. I told him to sit down. "Richie fired me this morning," I said. "He thinks I duped his tapes."

"He thinks you did what?"

"Duped. Had a duplicate made."

"I see." He frowned. "And did you?"

"No. I think Larry Boucher did it."

He looked at me doubtfully. "Larry Boucher?"

"An engineer at the mixing studio."

"The what?"

"You don't know a whole lot about record-making, do you?"

He shrugged. "This is my first record-piracy case."

I sighed. "Look, there are a couple of things you have to understand about the way records are made. Every studio has its advantages and drawbacks. Some do voices well, others are good for guitars, other are keyed to synthesizers."

"You use different studios then?"

"Yes. Records are made on different tracks. We use up to twenty-four. We put the lead guitar on one, the voice on another, the rhythm guitar on track three—like that. Since we record at different times in different studios you can imagine how the whole thing sounds when it's first played back together."

"Rough, huh?"

"Exactly. So we take it to another studio and mix it. Get all the instruments in balance, bring the voices out, all that. Mixing is to a record what editing is to a film. We take all the tapes into the studio and come out with one finished tape. An average record can be turned into a killer. Blow the mix and a killer can turn into a stiff."

"That's the last part of the process?"

"The last part of the *recording* process. After that, we turn them in to the company. They master the tapes and press the records."

"You're losing me again. Master the tapes?"

"Records are pressed from a silver disc called a master. It's a printing plate for a record."

"The tapes would have to be mastered before they could be pirated, wouldn't they?"

"No, anybody who can get his hands on the tapes can get a master made. There are thousands of mastering plants in this country, a dozen right here in the city. They'll do business with anybody who comes through the door."

"And this Boucher had access?"

"He worked in the mixing studio."

"There's something wrong. If you were still mixing the tapes, how could he steal them?"

"We were just sweetening. For all practical purposes, they were ready to go."

"Sweetening?" There was a pained look on his face.

"Punching up the sound. You know, highlighting a little, for the real sound freaks."

"I see. I have one other problem with this Boucher though," he said dryly.

"What's that?"

"The record company gave me a list of suspects. Boucher's name was there. I checked them all with the police. Boucher's dead."

"What?" Had Sherill been playing with me? Did he suspect me?

"They fished him out of the river a few days ago. The body had been in there for a while and you know what that can do. They just nailed down the ID this morning." He frowned. "Somebody bashed in the back of his head."

"His partners killed him?"

"Possibly." He stood and stretched. "Considering the time frame, it's a safe bet the mastering was done in the city. I'll need you to help me find out where."

"If Boucher's dead, why do you need to know that?"

"Because we have a murder now. Whoever did this with him—that is, if Boucher was involved at all—killed him. I want that person."

I put my coat on. "Let's go then."

Sherill drove a plain brown Ford so nondescript it could only have belonged to him.

We started hitting the mastering plants. At the fifth one we got lucky. The owner, a balding little man who spoke through a cigar clenched between his teeth, glared at us when Sherill asked about his recent jobs.

"Hey, who knows from anything?" he said. "Guy comes in wants a job done, I do the job. I'm a businessman."

"Then you mastered the Richie Clete album."

"Who's to know? Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. When did it come in?"

"About six weeks ago."

He flipped through his ledger. "Nope. No Clete here."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Richie Clete's the artist, not the guy who brought the job in."

"Who's to know from artist? I got customers, not artists."

Sherill said, "It would probably have been a rush job, wouldn't it?"

"It would have to be," I said.

He stepped nearer to the cigar-smoking man. "Do you do rush jobs? Maybe at premium prices, while the customer waits?"

"Damn right. This is a competitive business. Why? You got one?"

Tapping the ledger book, Sherill said, "Check it out. Five, six weeks ago."

He ran his fingers over the pages. "Here's one."

"What's the name?"

"Sam Oakley."

Sherill didn't react until we were outside. Neither did I. When we were in the car Sherill said, "You know the name?"

"Everybody knows Sam Oakley's name. He's connected, isn't he? Look, I didn't realize this was mob stuff."

"What did you expect? Record piracy's big business. About a quarter of the records and maybe half the tapes on the market are counterfeit."

"You figure Boucher went to Oakley?"

"Maybe. But there's another factor here."

"What's that?"

"Sam Oakley's brother was married to June Ameling. He's her brother-in-law. We might just have a family affair here."

"How do you know that?"

He started up the car and checked to see if the street was clear. Pulling out into the traffic he said, "It's my job to know stuff like that."

We watched an F.B.I. crew go over the studio.

"I should have known Sam would be messed up in this," June said.

Before I could answer, an investigator over near the safe called out to Sherill, who walked over to him.

After an uncomfortable silence June said, "I didn't do this, Carl, you know that. I've got a good thing here. Why would I mess it up?"

Sherill came back in time to pick up what she'd said. "Greed's always a possibility," he said. "Miss Ameling, there's what looks like dried blood and a whole bunch of disinfectant stains on the carpet near the safe there. It looks like your man was killed right here. Probably by whoever was opening the safe."

"Larry died *here*? That's terrible!"

"You're going to have to come down to the office with me."

"You've got it wrong, Sherill," I said. "June wouldn't do a thing like this. It doesn't make sense."

"From where I'm standing, it does. I'm sorry, Miss Ameling, but I'm going to have to take you in for questioning."

As he led her out, I tried to tell myself he was right, she'd killed Larry and sold the tapes. I watched him close the car door behind her and figured I'd better go see Richie.

I caught up with Richie at The Pit. Up-and-coming bands showcased

there, so whenever he was in town Richie fell by to check out the competition.

He was at a table with three girls. I tapped him on the shoulder and when he turned I shouted so he could hear me over the music.

"Get out of here, Carl," he said, turning his eyes back to the stage.

A singer wearing pancake and black eyeliner moaned out minimal lyrics in front of a four-piece group. I knew Richie hated that stuff, but he pretended to be engrossed in it.

"We have to talk," I said.

"We got nothing to talk about, creep."

"It's important, man. I know who ripped off those tapes."

He stroked one of the girl's shoulders. "So do I, creep."

"The F.B.I. just busted June Ameling."

He looked up at me. "You putting me on?"

"Come outside so we can talk."

He flashed the girls a grin and followed me out into the street. The night was chilly. I pulled up my collar and leaned against a parked car. We could still hear the throbbing of the music.

"The feds got June?" he said.

"Richie, Larry Boucher's dead. Somebody bashea in the back of his head."

"You're kidding! June wasted Larry?"

"No," I said. "I figure *you* did."

His face turned mean. "You'd better get out of my sight, man."

"What was it, all of Jeff's paranoia about the record company ripping you off? You figured to pick up a little extra money at their expense?"

"I'm warning you, Carl."

I ignored him. "I think you got greedy. You felt the label was cheating you so you figured why not pick up the difference by pirating your own record."

"You're crazy! That would be like stealing from myself!"

"Not if you thought you were already being stolen from. You'd see it as a way of recouping. You took the tapes, Larry saw you, and you wasted him. What'd you do, hit him with a reel of tape?"

"Look, I don't know what this fantasy of yours is, but I don't want to play."

"You knew the cops would be nosing around about Larry—after all, he

wouldn't stay at the bottom of the river forever—so you set me up. I don't know how you could have done it, man. I thought we were friends."

"I told you, I don't want to play! What makes you think I wasted Larry? Whoever hit that safe could've done it."

"Not just anybody. Larry got the back of his head crushed. There was no struggle, nothing messed up. June just figured he'd split—that's how calm it was. It had to be somebody he knew, somebody he trusted enough to turn his back on. He got his head bashed in-by a friend."

"You're crazy, man. I didn't waste anybody. It had to be June. The feds got her, didn't they?"

"I thought about that. But June wouldn't ruin her business for a quick buck. You and I are the only other people who could have gotten that safe open. I didn't do it. That leaves you."

"Yeah, well, that's your fantasy. You can't tie it on me."

"I don't have to. An F.B.I. man named Sherill's going to do that. You're through, Richie."

"And you came to gloat? Is that it?"

I shook my head. "I came here," I said, "because until this morning I thought we were friends."

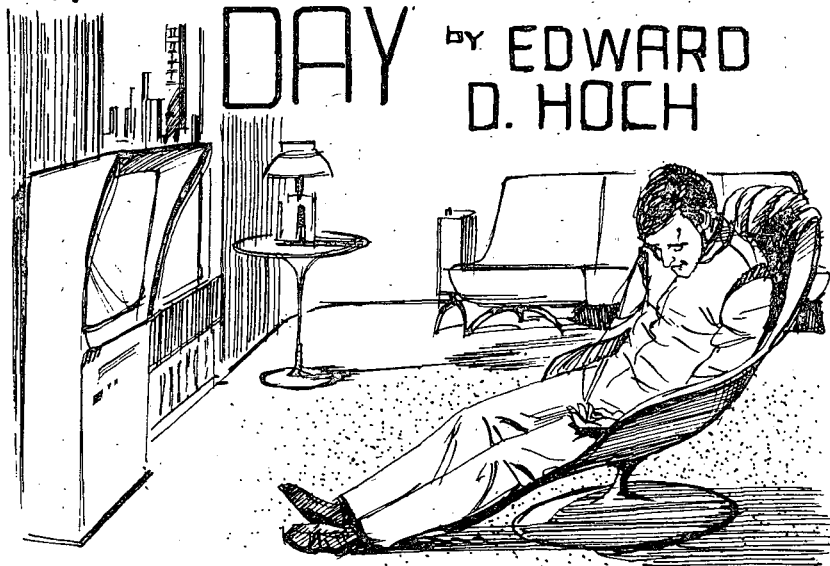
I turned and walked away, huddling inside my coat for warmth. As I walked home, I remembered the old days on the road, the hustling and scrambling years with Richie, and felt very much alone.



The World Population Index recorded every known birth and death on earth

SEVEN BILLION DAY

BY EDWARD
D. HOCH



I suppose one reason for all the publicity was that the murder took place on Seven Billion Day and involved some of the top computer experts in the country. And, of course, there was the murder method.

I'd arrived early for work that day, striding in under the digital calendar clock just as it read 10/7/14 * 8:24 A.M. I'd expected to be first into our dust-free climate-controlled environment on the top floor of the World Trade Center, but Sara Reading had beaten me to it again. She glanced

up from the tape scanner as I entered, flashed me her usual office smile, and announced, "We hit seven billion at 6:58 this morning."

"Is that why you're here so early?"

"Of course! This is the day we've been waiting for!" Sara took her job far more seriously than many male employees of The Wopoin Institute. "Seven billion people, Ralph—just think of it!"

It had been our goal ever since. The Institute was funded by the United Nations back in the mid-Eighties and charged with the awesome task of computerizing the names and identification numbers of all the people on earth. A decade earlier such a task would have seemed outrageous and impossible, but two events had come together in the 1980s to change that. The micro-chip revolution had given us the hardware we needed, and the World Health Organization's disease-reporting network had supplied the software. For if the instant reporting of communicable diseases from anywhere on earth was possible, certainly the instant reporting of all births and deaths was possible too.

WOPOIN—World Population Index—was the result. Our computer terminals were located in more than eight hundred cities worldwide. Every known birth and death had been recorded since 1986, and we'd added names from tax rolls, telephone directories, military records, and just about everything else. By the time I'd joined The Institute in 2006 we had over six billion names in computer storage.

The past eight years had been difficult though. We were down to the core of uncountables, a handful of barely civilized peoples who still lived in the Australian outback and the North African deserts. Most primitive places had vanished before the push of civilization, just as the dense Amazon jungles had given way to a massive logging operation in the Seventies and Eighties. But a few pockets of nomads and nonconformists still remained, resisting our best efforts to identify and register them. The population of the world now was generally estimated at seven billion, and within The Wopoin Institute it was agreed that the day we reached that figure we would have achieved our goal. Of course there'd be someone we'd overlooked somewhere—in a remote Indian village or a Siberian prison camp—but now we could truly say that just about all the people on earth were recorded in WOPOIN III. With birth registration at nearly 100 percent, the total could grow only more accurate with each passing day.

Sara and I were still congratulating each other when the others began

to drift in. Professor Vintnor was the director of The Institute, a spare, aging man with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Figures," he grumbled. "You young people dote on statistics. They mean nothing." He waved a video printout. "One hundred thousand feared dead in Pakistan cyclone! When those names start hitting WOPOIN your celebration will be over."

"Deaths don't change our accomplishment," Sara argued. "We've achieved our goal. The number of names in our computer corresponds to the estimated number of people on earth. That's good enough for me."

"This is Seven Billion Day," I told Vintnor. "When I came here eight years ago you told me this was the day we were aiming for, when the curve of WOPOIN's contents would overtake the estimated population of the earth. You had the graph in your office."

"The graph isn't there now," Professor Vintnor said. "It's been gone for some time."

Toby Watts came in then, jaunty as ever. He was wearing a one-piece flying suit and I knew he'd coptered in from New Jersey. "We're on the video," he announced.

Professor Vintnor looked disgusted. "Did you phone them, Ralph?"

I started to deny it, but Sara interrupted. "I called them. I thought it would please you after all our years of work."

"When did you call?"

"This morning about seven, right after the meter hit the seven billion mark."

"Do you always come in that early?" Vintnor asked.

"No," she answered, brushing the soft brown hair from her eyes. "But I noticed last evening we were getting close, and the monthly China report was due to be fed into WOPOIN early this morning. I had a hunch it would put us over."

"I'm the only one authorized to contact the press," the professor reminded her. "I thought that was understood."

"Hell, let's forget it," Toby suggested, always the peacemaker. "It's done, and The Institute can use the publicity." He flipped on the nearest computer terminal and punched up a printout of the night's input. "It was China, all right. Put us over the top."

"Funny thing," Sara said, as if she'd just remembered it, "when I switched on the terminal just before seven this morning the printout light was on."

I perked up at that. "Someone was getting a printout at that time of the day? In this building?"

"Not here. I was alone on the floor except for the security guard."

"Then you must have been mistaken," Professor Vintnor assured her. "No one else is authorized to pull printouts from WOPOIN when the office is closed."

"There's one possibility," I said. "The terminal at the World Health Organization at the U.N. They have a night man on duty."

"Who is it?" Vintnor asked.

Toby punched a button and consulted the video screen. "Daj Cranston."

"I'll get on it," I promised. "I know Cranston." He was an old-time WHO official, brought back from overseas duty and relegated to a night-time desk job he hated. I could almost picture him whiling away the time making unauthorized printouts.

The receptionist buzzed us from out front and her amplified voice filled the room. "Professor Vintnor, I have some press representatives here to see you about Seven Billion Day."

He sighed and turned from us. "Very well, I'll be right out." With a parting shot at Sara, he added, "See what you've done? They'll take up my entire morning."

When he was gone Toby Watts gave one of his familiar snorts. "Old buzzard's not himself today."

I remembered Cranston and went into my office to call him. Far off across Manhattan and uptown I could make out his building in the morning haze. He didn't go off duty till nine and I was hoping he'd stayed a few minutes later today. His secretary told me he was still there, but in conference. "Ask him not to leave till I get there, will you?" I told her. "It's important."

"I can't—"

"I'll be there in five minutes!" I said and broke the connection. On the way out I asked Sara about the press.

"They're still waiting," she said. "Vintnor is on the phone to Geneva."

I told her I'd be back shortly and took a minicopter from the roof uptown to the big new building just north of the United Nations. WHO had moved its headquarters to the city from Geneva, Switzerland, just two years earlier, following completion of the new hundred-story giant on the East River. I settled down to a perfect landing on the roof and took the elevator to Cranston's office on the ninety-fourth floor.

"He can't be disturbed," his secretary told me. "He's on overseas telescreen. A conference of some sort."

"I'll wait," I told her, and sat down.

My presence seemed to unnerve her as she operated the keyboard of the electronic typewriter at her desk. Several times she scanned the memory unit's image and made corrections before she allowed the printer to type out the finished page. Finally she sighed and got up from the desk, tapped lightly on the door to Cranston's office, and entered. Almost at once I heard her scream.

Cranston was slumped in his contour chair by the telescreen near the window. A small hole appeared to have been burned into his left temple. He'd been dead for some time.

It was afternoon before I returned to The Institute. Professor Vintnor was nowhere to be seen, but Toby Watts intercepted me as I came down the stairs from the roof. "What's this about Cranston being murdered? I just read it on the noon teleprint."

"It's true," I told him. "I was there when his secretary found the body. Apparently he was killed with a beam from a laser gun. The police just finished questioning me."

Sara Reading came out of her office to join us. "Maybe this'll get the media off our necks—give them something to write about besides Seven Billion Day."

"You were the one who called them in," I reminded her.

"But I didn't know how much it would upset Professor Vintnor. He finally had to leave the office to get away from them."

"Never mind that," Toby said, interrupting with his usual insistence. "Tell us about Cranston. Who'd want to kill that clown?"

"I have no idea."

"The secretary—maybe he was bedding down with her and she found somebody younger, wanted to get rid of him."

"I doubt that," I said. I thought a few moments. "He was on overseas telescreen when he was killed."

"Talking to whom?" Sara asked.

"They don't know yet. The police are checking the circuits and the meter records."

Toby was frowning in concentration. "As I remember it, there's only one door to Cranston's office."

"That's right."

"Then the killer had to pass by his secretary."

I shook my head. "Not necessarily. Seated at his telescreen, Cranston's left temple was facing the window. And that's where the wound was—in the left temple."

"Are you saying he was shot through the window?" Toby asked.

"A laser beam could do it without even breaking the glass."

"But he's on the ninety-fourth floor," Sara protested. "Are you trying to tell us someone flew by in a minicopter and zapped him through the window?"

They were both staring at me. It was as if we'd all remembered at once that I had flown by Cranston's office in a minicopter around the time he could have been murdered.

It was a long day, made longer by the clamoring of the media, who descended on us once again when they learned I'd been on the scene when Cranston's body was discovered. Was there some connection between his murder and Seven Billion Day? they wanted to know. The linkage, of course, was the World Health Organization. I could hardly deny the widely known fact that much of our raw data for the World Population Index came from WHO. Cranston had been in charge of the office on the night our total went over seven billion and now he was dead. What did it mean? And why had I been trying to see him when his body was found?

By the time I'd untangled myself from their questions I was ready for a quiet evening at home. Professor Vintnor had returned to the office in time to rescue me from the press, and I made my escape. Not even Toby's urging that we take in the new hologram show on Forty-Second Street could tempt me.

My apartment was in one of the new high-rises built on land reclaimed from the Hudson River. I liked it because the view was a knockout at any time of day or night and it was only minutes away from The Institute. The magnetic elevator lifted me to my fifty-seventh-floor apartment in a matter of seconds and I unlocked the door with my coded tenant card.

Sara was already there, waiting for me. She threw her arms around me and kissed me deeply. "I was beginning to think you preferred Toby's holograms to me," she said.

I took her hand and went over to switch on the electronic bartender.

"I couldn't get away from the press until Vintnor came back and took over. I figured you'd wait."

"That sounds smug," she replied with a grin. "Be careful. I've had other offers you know." My six-month relationship with Sara had been nothing short of perfect. At The Institute we were all business, but two or three nights a week she came to the apartment and cooked for me, made love to me.

"Other offers? Tell me who made them and I'll murder them."

Under the circumstances it was a poor choice of words. Sara was suddenly serious. "Ralph, did you kill Cranston?"

I removed two martinis from the machine and handed her one. "Do you think I did?"

"Of course not, but I had to ask."

"Well, I didn't. I'm as much in the dark as you are."

"You think it has something to do with The Institute?"

"I don't know what to think. But his being killed on Seven Billion Day seems more than a coincidence." I sat down beside her. "Look, we were never going to mix business with pleasure, remember?"

"This isn't just business, it's the future of The Institute!"

"What do you mean?"

"If Cranston or someone else was pulling printouts from WOPOIN, who knows what it means? The Institute has always been non-profit, but you know how we've been under pressure to release those names for a thousand different reasons. A list of all the people of earth could be invaluable to private enterprise, just as the American census figures are. The Institute could find itself in the middle of a scandal if they're being leaked to someone."

"All right—but while we're worried about the future of The Institute, what about *our* future?"

"I didn't know we had one, Ralph," she answered seriously. "I didn't know you ever thought beyond the present."

Her words angered me a bit, but I told her calmly, "I'm thirty-one years old, Sara. I've been at The Institute for eight of them. Maybe it's time I did something more with my life. I was playing with WOPOIN the other day, bringing up annual calendars for the next sixty years, and I realized that one of the dates on the screen was going to be the day I die. They all looked the same to me, but one of them would be my last day—like today was the last day for Daj Cranston."

"What are you trying to say, Ralph?"

"If I left The Institute, would you leave with me?"

"I—I don't know. I wouldn't go to any damn moon colony with you, I know that."

"Who's talking about a moon colony? There's plenty to do right here on earth. Now that we've counted all the people in the world, I'd like to start tending to their needs."

"Hm." She thought about it. "You want to open a video-order house and use the names to send them all catalogues?"

"You're hopeless," I declared, and we both started giggling. As often happened when we tried to have a serious discussion, we ended up making love.

We ate a light supper and then made love again. This time, though, Sara seemed merely to be going through the motions. I could tell her mind was back at The Institute. After a time I pressed the bedside button and the late-evening video news was projected onto the wall. The killing of Daj Cranston was the second item, reported by the anchorwoman in flat unemotional tones.

"An official of the World Health Organization was killed by a blast from a laser gun as he spoke on the telescreen to an unidentified party in Geneva, Switzerland, this morning. Daj Cranston, fifty-eight, was alone in his ninety-fourth-floor office at the time of the murder. Police are without a motive in the slaying and are investigating the possibility that the laser blast was fired accidentally from a passing minicopter."

I switched off the set. "Accidentally!" I said.

Sara got out of bed and started to dress. "Did you see any other minicopters in the area when you arrived there?"

"The sky was clear when I flew in. But he might have been killed earlier. His secretary didn't see him after nine. I arrived about a quarter after, but I'd been waiting a good twenty minutes before she went in and found the body." Something was stirring in my memory, but I couldn't quite dredge it up.

"What about Toby?" Sara asked suddenly.

"What about him?"

"He always seems to need money. Could he and Cranston have been involved in a plot together?"

"I don't know," I admitted, "but there's one way to check." I reached

for my clothes. "Hurry and finish dressing. We're going over to The Institute."

"In the middle of the night?"

"If you can get there at seven in the morning you can go there at midnight. I want to check out something on WOPOIN."

Despite the bright lights glowing on every floor, the World Trade Center was an eerie place at midnight. Once past the lobby security guards, we rode the elevator to the 110th floor in silence. Compared to the magnetic elevators in my apartment building, the ride always seemed to take forever.

Once inside The Institute I started to talk. "It couldn't be done from here because of the security check downstairs. Any Institute employee showing up night after night would have attracted suspicion, and stealing seven billion names and coded addresses isn't an overnight job. But Daj Cranston was on duty at night. He was in a perfect position to do it."

"What did you come here to check?"

I took her into Toby's office. It was across the floor from Vintnor's and mine, sharing the same view of New York harbor and the refurbished Statue of Liberty that Sara enjoyed from her office. Like all of us Toby had a computer terminal next to his desk, giving him direct access to WOPOIN III. I sat in his contoured chair, flipped the power switch, and played with the keys a bit.

"See this?" I showed Sara. "The light is on when a printout is being made by another terminal. That's why he couldn't steal the names during regular office hours. Someone would be sure to notice all the printouts being made. And he couldn't come here every night because of security. But he could team up with Cranston and accomplish the same purpose. The two of them together could spend the rest of their lives selling those names to private corporations all over the world. And The Institute—"

Sara tensed as we heard the elevator doors opening. Quickly I doused the light in Toby's office. Which was a mistake, because the office lights were usually left burning for security purposes.

We heard footsteps approaching in our direction and then someone stepped into the room. It was Toby Watts and he had a gun in his hand.

"Fancy finding you here," he said with a chuckle. "Don't you have a bed at home for this sort of thing, Ralph?"

I saw Sara flush at his words but I decided to ignore them. "I had a theory about Cranston's murder," I explained stiffly. "We came over to check it out."

"Funny thing. I had a theory too."

"Involving a gun?"

Toby glanced down at the weapon in his hand as if he'd forgotten it was there. "I saw my office light go out as I stepped off the elevator. I figured there were prowlers." He slipped the gun inside his coat.

"What's your theory?" Sara asked.

"Daj Cranston was draining us—slurping the data from WOPOIN every night almost as fast as we put it in. When Sara came in early this morning and discovered the printout light on, it tipped his hand and he killed himself."

"If it was suicide, what happened to the laser?" I asked.

"His secretary took it to protect his good name."

"It's an interesting idea," I admitted. "But she screamed as soon as she entered the office. And a laser gun is a pretty big thing to hide in an instant."

We heard the sound of the elevator again. This time Professor Vintnor emerged, accompanied by two security guards. "They have orders to notify me of late-night visitors," he said calmly, eyeing each of us in turn. "Suppose you explain what you're all doing here."

"We think Cranston was stealing names from WOPOIN," Toby declared. "We think our World Population Index is being funneled into private profit-making hands."

"Do you have grounds for such an accusation?"

"Unauthorized printouts were being made at night," I said. "Only Cranston could have gotten away with that. I think someone here put him up to it, then killed him before I could question him."

"But only you left the building," Vintnor pointed out. "The rest of us were here until well after Cranston's murder."

"I know," I said. And then I remembered the thing that had been gnawing at my subconscious. "But the killer didn't have to leave this building. If we can hit the moon with a laser beam we can certainly send one across Manhattan. I think Daj Cranston was murdered by a laser aimed and fired from here."

"Is that possible?" Toby wondered.

"Certainly. We're on the hundred and tenth floor here. Cranston's

office was on the ninety-fourth. There's nothing else that high on a line between here and his building. I remember noticing that, looking out at his building when I phoned his office this morning."

"But the killer would still have to get Cranston into position at the window," Sara pointed out. "How could that be done?"

I took a deep breath. This was the moment I dreaded. I turned to Vintnor and asked, "Do you want to tell them how you did it, Professor, or should I?"

He'd made the mistake of bringing the security guards up with him. When he went for a bookend on my desk and tried to brain me with it, they grabbed him and wrestled him to the floor. He looked rumpled and bent and suddenly very old. It was a sorry end to the whole business.

"But he was the director here!" Sara argued. "Why did he need Cranston?"

"He was still subject to the same rules as everyone else. His presence every night would still have attracted suspicion. And certainly his salary here wasn't as much as the names would have brought him on the outside. He teamed up with Cranston, then killed him without a second thought. Maybe he planned to kill him sooner or later anyhow. Maybe that's why he had the laser gun hidden in his office."

"How did you know it was him?" Toby asked. His face was ashen and he seemed unable to believe what had happened.

"Vintnor's office is on my side of the building, facing the U.N. complex uptown. You and Sara face the harbor. The laser shot needed a straight line, of course. And then there was the matter of luring Cranston to the window. He was on the telescreen to Geneva when he was killed, and I remembered that Vintnor was calling Geneva when I left to copter uptown. Vintnor simply had his call to Cranston relayed through Switzerland and back to New York. Once he had Cranston in position by the window he sighted through a powerful scope and killed him with the laser."

Toby went outside with the security people to meet the police. Sara watched him go, shaking her head sadly. "What's to become of The Institute now, Ralph?"

"Toby will run it, at least till they appoint someone else. He'll do a good job too."

"You talked about leaving—do you really intend to?"

"Yes, I think so."

Sara reached out to touch my hand. "I'll go with you."

"Why the sudden change? Vintnor?"

"Yes, but not in the way you think. I was remembering something he said this morning about young people doting on statistics. He was trying to tell us about a hundred thousand Pakistanis killed in a cyclone and we didn't even listen. The numbers had become more important to us than the human lives. I don't want to be a number any more, Ralph. Not in WOPOIN or anywhere else."

Before we left she sat down at the terminal and erased our names and numbers from the master reel. As far as WOPOIN was concerned we had just died.

"Now The Institute doesn't have all the people on earth," I said as we departed.

Sara took my arm and smiled. "Who the hell cares?" she said.

Classified Continued

(from page 128)

PERSONAL

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EIGHTY DAYS AT SEA

by
**ERNEST
SAVAGE**



Ed. Martin and his wife Bertha were first aboard the *Marion H. Holmes*—7,800 gross tons, 320 feet at the Plimsoll line, a freighter. Their luggage consisted of a suitcase, a valapac, a vanity bag, and a middling-sized steamer trunk. The ship was scheduled to sail at twelve noon and Ed had wanted to board early, to get the feel of the thing, he told himself. Bertha, on the other hand—all ninety-eight pounds of her, carefully stuffed into the steamer trunk—couldn't have cared less.

The present voyage of the *Marion H.* had originated in Seattle. From Oakland, where the Martins boarded her, she would go next to Los Angeles. Then Acapulco and Guatemala, through the Panama Canal to Willemstad for refueling and La Guaira, Venezuela. Then across the Atlantic to Cadiz, Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, Valletta in Malta, and finally to Piraeus, Athen's port city. From there, the travel agent had said, depending upon whether or not the Suez Canal was still open, she would take a load of Pentilic marble (Praxiteles used the stuff) to South Africa. If not, she would work her way back to the States, first port of call Los Angeles, doing business where she could. The agent had promised no less than eighty days at sea. Somewhere along the line, the earlier the better, Martin would consign his wife of nearly forty years to the deep.

He had given that point considerable thought. The first leg of the voyage would take them along the coast to L.A. and the likelihood of her being found at sea if dumped there, or even of floating to shore, was too great. His best bet, he'd tentatively decided, was the leg from L.A. to Acapulco, where the ship would be on broader waters—the third or perhaps the fourth night from now.

On the other hand, he had no idea what was going on in that steamer trunk. Martin had been a bookkeeper and office manager all his life. He had no notion of the processes of decomposition, the rate at which, for instance, gases would accumulate in the two large plastic trash bags he'd put her in, sealed tight one inside the other. She had been dead a little less than twelve hours when he boarded the *Marion H.* Now, settling into his stateroom, he eyed the grey-green trunk dubiously, sure that the sides were already beginning to bulge. But he had anticipated flights of nervous anxiety and steeled himself against this first bad one. He mustn't lose his nerve; everything depended on that.

Martin was a tall, slender man, at sixty-two still unwrinkled, free of jowls and turkey wattles under the chin, the long regimen of calisthenics he performed every night an apparent success. But his health was no proof against the frisson of nerves that swept him once again.

His eyes flicking left and right, he emerged from his stateroom, went down the companionway to the transverse hall, turned right through the open double doors to the promenade, then left and forward through a second set of double doors to the foredeck rail, counting as he went, the steps, the seconds, squinting down finally at the oily sheen of harbor

water and wanting desperately to do it *now*, to be rid of her at once and hang the risk. Sweat bathed him in the cool morning air.

Harry Shea was second aboard that morning. Harry was sixty-five, a solid, beefy, quick-stepping man, snap-brim hat pulled low over a balding head. He was scowling and unhappy, and directly after the steward showed him to his stateroom and deposited his single suitcase there he went aft, threading his way through late boarding activity, and leaned heavily against the stern rail. He stared across the Bay at the profile of San Francisco and his scowl, if anything, deepened. That had been his beat over there for forty-two years. From foot cop to Captain of Detectives he'd worked that troubled turf for all he was worth. And now they'd taken it away from him. But in exchange the sea he'd watched, smelled, felt in the tides of his blood through all these years was his. So it was all right. It was a fair trade, really. But they could have waited a while, a few more years. Just because a man was sixty-five! He had a dozen ongoing cases, ten dozen files still open in his mind. He'd never been anything else—a soldier, then a cop. And now a retiree.

He lit a cigar and tried to relax. Hell, he'd just emptied his desk yesterday afternoon, and the party the guys had given him last night was like a hundred others they'd thrown together. Still, this was the best way to do it—not hanging around town brooding, not moping around the station nosing into what was no longer his business.

Eighty days, the agent had said, maybe more. Plenty of time to make the adjustment. He worked the frown off his face and wondered for the first time who his shipmates might be. You can expect on the average, the agent had told him, one retired doctor and his wife, one honeymoon couple, one or two retired schoolteachers, one or two widows, a middle-aged couple. "It's pot luck, Captain Shea," he'd said. "But usually a congenial mix. After all, they're all out for fun."

Shea glanced at his watch. It was 10:45. In a little more than an hour they'd be underway, and then he'd see.

Helen Sherman followed her sister, Ella Hendricks, up the boarding ramp. Ahead of Ella, the porter was carrying a surprisingly light load of luggage for two grown women—three suitcases, one in each hand and one under his left arm.

Alone in their cabin a moment later, Ella sat down on one of the two bunk beds and burst into tears.

"There now," her sister said, "we're here—we've done it." She was used to Ella's tears and turned away to glance at her own cheerful image in the mirror over the pullman sink, which was just outside the compact toilet and shower room. She was a very pretty woman and she knew it. At fifty-nine, she'd been widowed for two years and had it not been for Ella's problem she'd be remarried by now. Mating was the core of her ethos. She understood herself almost entirely—no shadowed corners, no neurotic quicksands, no awkward hangups.

Ella, on the other hand, was a mass of tangled emotional skeins—as why shouldn't she be? Married for thirty-six martyred years to a brutal man, now blessedly dead, she was a psychiatric classic, a hand-crafted basket case.

"This trip," Helen said soothingly. "Dear Ella, this trip will be the making of us both."

"We shouldn't have killed him," Ella blubbered in response. She pulled a twelve-inch-square man's handkerchief from her sleeve and draped it across her eyes and nose. She was one year younger than her sister and looked ten years older, even when she wasn't crying.

"Nonsense," Helen said crisply. "Dry your tears. They'll be serving lunch soon."

Lunch was a bowl of broth followed by cold cuts. The first meal aboard, the dining-salon steward explained, was always light and informal. Later, they'd stuff them to the gunnels.

There were three tables in the salon. At the smallest were Captain Ralls and two of his officers. At each of the other two sat six passengers. Helen and Ella, Harry Shea, Ed Martin, and Tom and Ruth Phelps, both retired schoolteachers, were at one. At the other were Dr. and Mrs. Allen Sloan, a quiet, shy honeymoon couple (Bingo! Harry Shea thought), and a retired commercial airline pilot and his wife.

At twelve-fifteen the ship was still not underway. A seaman brought a message to Captain Ralls, who stood up at once and asked for attention. Helen Sherman, who was seated directly opposite Ed Martin, glanced at the captain and then back at Ed, with whose good looks she'd been quickly taken. There was a piece of cold ham on Ed's fork, half raised to his mouth.

"I've just been informed," the captain said, "that there's a strike of the tugboat operators." Helen watched the piece of ham tremble off Ed's fork and fall to his plate. "This means—as I'm sure you understand—that we can't leave as scheduled. I'm sorry. But in the meantime please consider this ship your home."

There had been a variety of responses to the captain's words, ranging from indifference on the part of the honeymoon couple to irritation, most particularly Harry Shea's. Shea had timed his retirement precisely to suit the scheduled departure of the *Marion H.*. He was a methodical and orderly man. As a cop he'd been on duty, willy-nilly twenty-four hours a day. Some case or another was always sifting through his mind, every new face checked against his private rogues' gallery. To contain this endless internal activity, he needed external order, things done on time and done right.

"Take a guess," he said gruffly to the captain, "as to how long."

"A day, two days—a week. Later this afternoon I'll know more and let you all know at once."

"Can we go ashore?"

"Yes, but stay in close touch."

This dialogue barely touched Ed Martin's conscious mind. For a moment he'd felt total panic, utter doom—and, for the first time, a sense of guilt at what he'd done. But somehow his fork retrieved the ham and guided it successfully back to his mouth, his hand miraculously steady. He kept his stricken eyes from Helen Sherman's until the spasm feathered away. She'd been staring boldly at him all through this miserable meal, and while she was lovely and her attention was vaguely flattering, he could do without it. It was bad enough sitting next to a cop.

Ed Martin wasn't much of a drinking man, but that evening, ashore, he had four martinis before picking away at a light meal in a tacky waterfront café. He was back aboard at ten o'clock, visited his stateroom long enough to stare expectantly at the steamer trunk—a growing compulsion—and then went aft to lean on the stern rail and gaze at the city lights across the Bay. His bookkeeper's mind was offended, as always, at the waste of energy that wanton display represented and he was trying to work up a proper dudgeon on that theme when Harry Shea, materializing silently at his side, said, "Martin, I'd like a word with you, if you don't mind."

Martin's heart stopped for a moment and then resumed with a sudden painful thrash. "You," he breathed, "startled—"

"I didn't mean to. But listen, I want to talk to you about these women at our table. The two sisters. Let's go back to my cabin."

"Your cabin?"

"Well, yours then. I want you to see some pictures. I want your opinion."

In his cabin Martin's volatile strength waned. The martinis, the greasy supper, and now this cop five feet away from the steamer trunk. "Look," he said, shoving some snapshots under Martin's nose. "I never forget a face—forty-year habit. I saw these two or three weeks ago when I was still on duty. Who are they?"

"Well—"

"Our tablemates, right? Would you believe it—I retire yesterday and I'm back at work today. Look at those cheekbones. That's the pretty one—Sherman. You can always tell by the cheekbones. You can't change them like you can a nose."

"Why are they wanted?"

"Material witnesses. Probably killed this guy back in Kansas City. The husband of the other one—Hendricks, I think she calls herself. Both names are fake though—proof positive they're on the lam. And guilty. I can smell guilt a mile away; I always could. What do you think?"

Martin cleared his throat with some difficulty. "About what?"

"Is it them?"

"You seem sure."

"I am. But—"

"But what?"

"I retired yesterday." Shea shrugged. "I mean I'm not a cop no more. I didn't think that would make a difference, but there you are. Besides—"

"What?"

"I'd have to stick around. The booking, the hearings, and so forth. It would ruin the trip for me—cancel it."

Not to mention, Martin thought, for them. He watched Shea light a cigar and go over and sit on the steamer trunk, which was shoved against the wall.

"I don't suppose," Shea said, "you've got a drink in the place?"

"No, I don't. Let's go ashore."

"Nah, I've got a bottle in my room. Listen, Martin, did the Sherman

woman say they were doing the complete trip? Coming all the way back here, I mean."

"Yes, that's what she said."

Shea rotated his cigar against his pursed lips, blew small dabs of smoke at the ceiling. "O.K.," he said, "we've got this: we know they're the ones—right?"

"I guess so."

"So we all finish the trip—eighty or eighty-five days, whatever it is—and then I turn 'em in." He studied Martin's pale, passive face through narrowed eyes. "How good are you at keeping a secret?"

"Well, I haven't had much—"

"I mean for nearly three months? Treat 'em like ordinary, decent people. And not tell anyone else. Can you do it?"

"I guess so," Martin said. "But maybe we should just forget about it. Maybe they had a good reason."

"No way can we forget about it, whatever the reason. It ain't like jiggling the books for a couple of thousand bucks. It's *murder!*" He tapped cigar ash into the pullman sink. His left hand fell flat against the trunk and he looked at it objectively for a moment. "You carry a lot of stuff for a single," he said. "Me, I got one small suitcase—a lot of wash-and-wear stuff. But then, I'm a bachelor. Are you a bachelor?"

"No." It was closing in on him again, the whole threatening world. He sat down heavily on his bed, having given up hope that Shea would leave soon. "Well, sort of. I'm a widow. *Widower!*" His voice sounded shrill and guilty; surely Shea would notice it.

But Shea said blandly, "How long?"

"Not very."

"Still mourning, I see. Me, I never had no use for the marital state. Cops make lousy husbands and worse fathers." He stood up abruptly, a windfall of ash hitting the floor. "O.K., so we got our secret. Just play it cool, Martin, follow my leads."

After Shea had gone, Martin took a long hot shower, swallowed two of his wife's nembutal capsules (she'd been on them for years and he had a nearly full bottle), and got into bed. Almost at once he fell into a deep sleep, and when he woke eleven hours later the ship was at sea, already past the Golden Gate and heading south.

"We missed you at breakfast," Mrs. Sherman said.

"You did," Shea said unamiably, "I didn't. Hey, we're at sea, Martin, did you notice? All my life I watched these buckets come and go through the Gate. Now I'm finally on one."

Martin nodded, his eyes steadfastly avoiding Mrs. Sherman's across the table. We're a pair of killers, he thought to himself; but she was carrying the load better than he was.

The day was sunny, the sea calm, and when lunch was over most of the passengers toured the decks, making themselves at home. Martin felt it politic to go along and soon Mrs. Sherman tucked her arm through his, a form of intimacy he'd always found awkward.

"Mal de mer, I suppose," she said, with reference to his morning in bed.

"Yes." He was grateful for a logical excuse for that default, as well as others no doubt ahead.

"Well, it'll pass," she said, as they strolled the foredeck. "I'm so glad you're aboard, Ed," she went on, giving his arm a squeeze and looking up at him the way Nancy Reagan looks up at Ronnie—with big El Greco eyes. "It's such a gamble on a twelve-passenger freighter. You never know to whom Fate will assign you. You're a widower, did you say?"

"I didn't say. But, yes, I am."

"And I'm a widow." Another telling squeeze of the arm.

They proceeded to the prow of the ship and looked down at the powerful cleavage of water below. To their left California slipped steadily astern and would for the rest of the day. Word was that in Los Angeles they'd unload and load through the night to make up for the lost time, and that pleased Martin. With luck, Bertha would be gone forty hours from now, only the circumstance of her killing, no longer the evidence, left to haunt him. But he'd planned it so carefully only the worst kind of luck could do him in. She had no relatives and her only friend had died six months ago—the event that had precipitated his plan. No one would miss her. And he intended to debark in L.A. at the end of this voyage and start life anew there.

She had been impossible, the long decades of their marriage a sexual and emotional dust bowl. She had smoked heavily and suffered from emphysema the last several years of her life. She had been a closet drinker, as had her late friend. She couldn't fry an egg without setting the kitchen on fire, never once had washed a dish or cleaned a room. Hers had been

a miserable, wasted life, and she had pleaded several times—bitterly self-aware—that he kill her and put an end to it.

All of this circled constantly in Martin's mind, like a flight of dark and dangerous birds: his reasons, his defense. And standing there, linked arm in arm with another killer—for he was sure of that now—he wondered what *her* lines of defense were. But, of course, he dared not ask. But he wondered how she could be so gay, so untroubled, so pleased with herself. Would he be, once he got rid of that horror in the trunk?

"Are you retired, Ed, or is this merely a vacation?" Mrs. Sherman asked.

"Well, I'm sort of retired," he said vaguely. "The company I worked for went out of business after nearly forty years." It was another circumstance that had suggested his plan. The people he'd worked with knew he was married, but they were dispersed now, and they'd been his only friends.

"Bankrupt?"

"No, no—a planned termination. In fact, there was a rather substantial final bonus."

"How nice for you."

He shouldn't have said that, he realized at once. Something had sparked in her at the reference to money. The bonus hadn't been all that much, actually. Then, like a fool, he said, "I'm comfortable," and the spark became a steady light in her eyes.

They turned and as they began walking aft, taking the starboard side, Shea approached on the port side. "I don't like that man," she said.

"He's a cop."

"That's not it. I know and like several policemen. It's something else. He has a bull-in-a-china-shop quality. He's a blunderer. The contrast between you is incredible. The handsome civilized man and the loud-mouthed boor."

They climbed a steep railed set of steps to what she called the boat deck, and indeed there were two large davit-rigged lifeboats there, one on each side. Leaning against the forward rail they had a clear overview of the very spot on the deck below from which he planned to drop Bertha into the sea.

Why had he put up with her for so long, he wondered. Why hadn't he divorced her six months after the nuptials, or at any time in the succeeding million years?

"I love the ocean," Mrs. Sherman said, facing the breeze, her chin up, her short-cropped hair aflutter. She had a neat, sharp profile, and scarcely a wrinkle. "Just think, eighty lovely days of it. Oh, Ed, I'm so glad you're one of us!"

One of us! One of a select group of killers? She hadn't meant that, she'd meant one of the passengers, he knew that, but when she snuggled closer, he had all he could do not to rebuff her.

He hadn't planned on a full moon and a cloudless night sky, but he had no choice now. As he dropped the rubbery black bag over the rail he kept his eyes closed as a portent that all other eyes would be closed too. In fact, he'd shut off all of his sensory apparatus when he'd opened the steamer-trunk lid.

When he opened his eyes he was looking directly at the moon and like a pagan he began a muttered intonation. "There she is," he said, "water to water, where she began, where we all began. You've done better work—and, I suppose, worse—but if your system is to send us back redesign her first, will you, please? In any properly run factory she'd have been a reject."

He'd had quite a lot to drink through the long evening, readying himself for the first touch of the bloated bag. Now he belched into the silvery night air and hiccoughed gently. He supposed he should address a few words to a more specific God, but no clear picture of one formed in his mind. "It was euthanasia," he said to Whoever was listening. "She wanted me to do it, asked me to a thousand times. Well, three or four anyway." He belched again and issued a final plea. "You understand, don't You, that I couldn't face retirement with her? I mean, could You have? If You note the fall of a sparrow, as has been said, surely You noted the long steady slide of good old Bertha. Wouldn't even wash a dish."

He'd never been this drunk before and was struck with the magical powers of liquor, his growing indifference to the world at large, its threats and punishments. Besides, you got two moons instead of one—two long, silvery paths to eternity. Or did he mean infinity?

Back in his stateroom he sniffed the air, but there was no hint of odor. The well worked duty-free bottle of J&B was on his bedside table and he drank a hefty snort. The lid of the trunk was still open and the two pillows from her bed he'd used for padding to keep the body from moving around

were now in plain sight, the only things left in this world that she'd touched, and sudden tears welled in his eyes. Now that she was gone, *really* gone, he missed her: the tyranny of the poorly made.

She had changed, he thought. She seemed less possessive but, oddly, more attentive, as though he'd gained for her some new dimension. All through the next day she was either with him or tracking him with her lambent eyes until finally, toward the end of the afternoon, he retreated to his stateroom. But just as he settled down with a scotch and soda she knocked on his door and entered unbidden.

There was a single chair and the trunk. There were the two extra pillows on his bed. Her eyes scanned them all at a glance, then settled on him and his drink.

"This evening," she said, "I was going to have a little cocktail party for our fellow passengers, but I guess I'll have to put it off."

"Do you want a drink?" It was all he could think of to say.

"Yes, please. I see you have two extra pillows for your bed."

"I brought them with me. I'm a three-pillow man."

She went over and picked one up and held it to her face, sniffing. "Patchouli," she said. "An interesting scent for a man." She turned to him, her face open and concerned. "Edward, what did you do last night? What did you throw into the sea?"

There was no dissimulating his reaction. He turned sheet-white and beet-red in quick order, the drink shaking in his hand. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"It glittered in the moonlight—a black plastic bag. You had trouble lifting it over the rail." She went and lifted the lid of the trunk, saw it was empty, and turned to him again, her eyes bright with sympathy and understanding. "We saw you—Ella and I. We were on the boat deck."

"It was after midnight," he said feebly, then blundered on. "It was just stuff I didn't want—old stuff."

"Old stuff you didn't want," she said. "What was her name, and how in the world did you work it out, dear boy?"

He sat down heavily on the bed and she went to the pullman sink, got his tooth glass, and made herself a drink, swirling the glass in her hands like a snifter. "But how did you work it out?" she repeated, sitting next to him on the bed, hip to hip.

"Well," he said, defeated, "she had no friends, no relatives, no work

record, no bank account, charge cards, or social security. She never even voted. She was almost a non-person." He tried to edge away from her, but the bed was too soft. "I planned this trip four or five months ago, bought my ticket, got my passport, cancelled my lease, cut all ties. I was going to get off in Los Angeles on the return leg and start over."

"What a marvelous idea."

He stared at her, rearing back a little to bring her into focus. "You mean—"

"Of course! Did you think I'd turn you in? But you must get better control of yourself. I knew at once you had some damning secret when they announced the tugboat strike in port. And with that awful policeman sitting next to you at the table—it's a wonder he didn't pick it up too. But, of course, now things will be easier for you, won't they? I mean, with the—'old stuff'—gone."

"But Ella—" he said wanly.

"Oh, pooh on Ella. She does exactly what I tell her to. In fact, she's been watching you like the little hawk she is."

"Hawk?"

"She's a very observant person. But of course, I'd told her to be. Last night she—"

"Ella?"

"Yes—she saw you, and then together we watched the disposal of—what was her name?"

"Bertha."

"Bertha. You were an awfully long time getting her over the rail."

His drink was gone and he reached for the bottle nearby, reactions of several kinds setting in, but relief emerging as dominant. So he'd gotten away with it—or, at least, the worst was over. This had amounted to a confession, and confession was supposed to be good for the soul. But she'd demand a price, wouldn't she? Once again he reared back to get her into focus, and once again she beat him to the punch, patting his knee reassuringly. Nobody had ever patted his knee in his life.

"Don't worry, Edward dear," she said. "This merely brings us closer—makes us better friends." She got up, bolted the last half of her drink the way Bertha used to when he entered a room unexpectedly, and left.

When they rose from the table Shea took him firmly by the elbow and

steered him across the main salon to the port side, where there was a small bar. By this time—the first full day after Acapulco—everybody who drank had a personal cluster of tax-free bottles on the shelves. Shea poured himself a bourbon and said, "I don't like it. I'm worried."

"About what?" Martin, who was finding increasing solace in liquor, mixed himself a J&B and soda.

"You and the Sherman woman. You're thick as fleas on a hillbilly's dog."

"It means nothing."

"Yeah? How about her announcement a few minutes ago that you and she are throwing a little party tonight—here?" He indicated the group of tables in front of the bar where the passengers played cards, wrote letters, and drank together. Dr. and Mrs. Sloan were just seating themselves at one of the tables, and the doctor, who had recently retired himself, cast Shea a stern diagnostic look. He, like Shea, was finding retirement anathema and he had taken everybody's blood pressure at least twice, issuing droves of pills. He had declared only one or two of the passengers fit to live and he'd warned Shea in particular against an overburdened heart. Martin, on the other hand, he'd declared to be in great shape for a man of his years. Martin, who had been more surprised than pleased at the news, now answered Shea.

"I didn't know anything about it," he said. "I thought she was planning to have a cocktail party in her room."

"Martin, have you told her?" Shea's voice was a gruff whisper, falling short of the doctor's bent ear.

"About being wanted? No. But I'd like to know exactly what she's accused of, Shea. You never told me."

"Keep your voice down," Shea warned. "What she did was kill her sister's husband—and I did tell you that."

"How did she kill him?"

"What happened is, this arsonist she hired confessed after she and her sister skipped town. They nailed him on another charge and he was trying to cop a plea. He said he saw this man's body in the place when he fired it—a guy dead on the floor. Also, she's wanted for questioning in the death of her own husband a couple of years earlier."

"But nothing's been proved."

"Skipping town, false names, this trip—that's reason enough for suspicion. Just keep your lip buttoned, Martin, or we'll both be in the

soup—withholding evidence, harboring crooks—” He drank lustily, a challenging eye cast the doctor’s way.

Martin spent most of the rest of the afternoon in his stateroom with the DO NOT DISTURB sign hung outside the door. But a little after five Ella Hendricks knocked on his door and entered briskly when he went to unlock it. She had changed tremendously in the days they’d been at sea. She had straightened her bowed back, lifted her sagging chin, and in general retro-aged a dozen years. In fact, her eyes now sparkled nearly as brightly as her sister’s.

Surprised by the visit, Martin offered her a drink, which she refused firmly, almost censoriously. “I want a word with you,” she said, “about the party tonight.”

“What about it? Please sit down.”

“Thank you. Do you know what Helen proposes to announce to the gathering?”

“I have no idea. What?”

“Your engagement—hers and yours.”

“Good God!”

“I thought you’d be surprised.”

“No way!” Martin said.

“Oh, don’t be so sure, Edward. Furthermore, she intends to marry you in a few days—with, of course, Captain Ralls’ help.”

Martin sank onto the bed, the tentative new elan he’d been feeling wiped out. “I—I—”

“What, Edward?”

“Can’t—won’t!”

“Tell her that. Now!”

“But—”

“It’s your only hope.” She smiled, suddenly an attractive woman. “Be firm, Edward. Tell her you don’t know enough about each other yet. Tell her you want to know more about her first—*all about her*.” She got up and went to the door. “She’s in our stateroom now, preparing. You have an hour.”

Four minutes later, as Helen let him into her stateroom, he was pale and shaken. He had no particular plan in mind, and he knew as much

about her as he cared to. But he did have resolve, and when she kissed him on the lips in greeting he pulled away.

"Kansas City," he rasped. "I think it was anyway. Ella's husband—you killed him. Some arsonist you hired to—"

"Pshaw!" she said. "You know! Ella told you, the rascal."

"Not Ella. Harry Shea—the cop."

Eyes narrowed, she said, "You're joking."

"No. He recognized you the first day aboard, went ashore, and checked it out. Murder, etcetera. No marriage for us, Helen, forget the announcement." Shock plus a growing residuum of scotch had slightly addled his tongue. "No announcement, no party."

"Oh, Ed, what difference does it make? I'm glad you know. It gives us even more in common. We were meant for each—"

"No! More in common, my foot."

"Oh, Ed!" she repeated as he turned and veered out of the room to return to his own and the ever more friendly bottle.

He holed up for twenty-four hours and didn't emerge until Emil, the stateroom steward who brought him his meals, announced a tragedy aboard.

"What tragedy?" Martin asked indifferently.

"A death, sir. Mr. Shea. Heart, the doctor said."

Luckily, he was seated and somewhat inured in scotch, but Martin knew at once that the doctor was wrong.

So she'd killed him!

But she was the same old ebullient Helen at the table, at least around the eyes, which seemed permanently fixed on his. He didn't waver under their steady impact. Instead he met them full on, heavy though his felt with shared knowledge. *Killer*, his said to hers, this changes nothing, and hers retorted that of course it did.

He took the bull by the horns and said bluntly at coffee time, "What do they do with the body under these circumstances? Burial at sea?"

"Wouldn't that be romantic?" Helen enthused. "With a flag over the coffin and a proper service."

"Not hardly," Tom Phelps, the schoolteacher and general know-it-all, said. "They'll keep him on ice until we get back to the States. Then an autopsy."

Ella had been quiet through the meal, as was her wont. Now she said, "That will prove nothing. It will still appear to be a heart attack."

"Appear?" Phelps said, and Martin wondered in a flash if Phelps had anything on his mind half as exciting as he, Martin, did. Or ever had had. The vagrant thought surprised him, but there it was, standing tall. Encompassed by death, he'd never felt more alive.

"Well, I'm sure it was," Ella said. "I mean, after all, isn't almost everything? The heart finally attacked and quitting under the blow?"

"Attacked by what though?" Martin said, awed at his own daring—it wasn't a turn of talk to be encouraged, even though he'd started it. Playing with fire?

"A lifetime of drink," Helen said. "And those awful cigars. But really, such a death is kindly, isn't it? So swift."

"Yes," Ella said. "I quite agree. The most disagreeable thing is a lingering decline, and lucky is he—or she—who evades it."

"If you don't mind," Mrs. Phelps said stiffly, "I find this inappropriate table talk."

Shea's chair had been removed and the space around the table reapportioned among the remaining five. This had placed Mrs. Phelps at Martin's left and he had found her tight, fussy ways an annoyance. But she had never killed anyone. His eye caught Ella's at that moment and a bond formed between them with a clank, like the closing of a bank-vault door. They were, each of them, inside the mess looking out, and outside looking in. He smiled at her.

At eleven-thirty that night he left his stateroom and went aft to lean against the stern rail and watch the ship's roiling wake, phosphorescent in the warm southern seas. In a moment she joined him, as he'd been sure she would—the hawk. They watched the retreating water in silence for a while and then he said, "How did she kill him?"

"Oh, she has several things in her kit—poisons that do it at once and leave no trace. Her husband was a chemist. She was his assistant for years."

"Did she kill him too?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well?"

"Yes, she did."

"Why?"

"For the worst of reasons—and the best. He bored her."

Martin was about to natter at that judgment when he realized it fit his case precisely. "And your husband?"

"He was a brute. He terrified me. But he was hard to kill, he fought her. There were marks on him."

"Thus the arsonist?"

"Yes."

"Were you in on it?"

After a heartbeat's hesitation she said, "Not in the doing of it, but I approved. He deserved it. Oh, how he deserved it."

Martin noted again the remarkable change in her since the voyage began. Out from under an intolerable burden, she had flourished as, he realized, he was beginning to do himself. Justifiable homicide? Was there really such a thing? He shook away the question, but inside his heart joy reigned, a high-roller's joy.

A few minutes passed in quiet contemplation of the sea and then he said, as though announcing his departure from one world and his entry into another, "Tomorrow we go through the Panama Canal."

The second passenger death aboard Captain Ralls' ship had him in a black-browed fury. "This has never happened to me before," he growled. "Twice I have lost one passenger, but never two."

"When you have a bunch of old people aboard, almost all in poor health," Dr. Sloan rejoined, "it's bound to happen. Her blood pressure was a scandal."

So it was set down in the ship's log as another heart attack and the body was consigned to the cold room.

The *Marion H. Holmes* had passed through the Canal and was on its way to Willemstad when the body was discovered.

"I thought she was asleep," a distraught Ella Hendricks moaned. "Sometimes she sleeps till noon. This is awful—I can't bear it!" Mrs. Sloan, who'd had considerable practice in calming the bereaved, put an arm around her shaking shoulders, but she was not to be consoled. At least not for a while.

Ed Martin, of course, knew what had happened. Standing at the boat-deck rail, a soft Caribbean breeze cooling his brow as they passed through the calm blue waters, he considered how two of his nemeses were now gone, but a third was left. Through her tears he had seen in her eyes a

calm the equal of this sea's, out of which awful storms frequently arose. His guard was up, the inner man ready.

In Willemstad they were given ten hours of shore time while the ship refueled. From there it would be a short run to La Guaira, Venezuela, and then would begin the long crossing to Spain. It was a lovely day. They were standing side by side in front of a shop window full of Delft pottery. He'd already warned her he didn't go for linked arms.

"I want," she said, "lovely things for our home."

Earlier that day, in the taxi coming to town, she had announced that they would be married—"after a discreet interval, of course"—and he had shrugged a kind of acceptance. Or indifference. "What," he wanted to know, whispering it, "did you do with the—you know—the chemicals?"

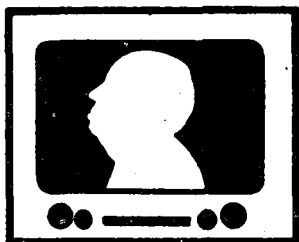
"Overboard," she said. "The only thing left in her kit is a bottle of aspirin and some cosmetics."

Sure, he thought, all overboard save one dose, and that one in safe reserve, with his name on it. But what did it matter? It was quick and painless, apparently, and far more welcome than, say, the tumble down a Greek mountainside he had in mind for her. The short happy life of Ella Hendricks, he thought sardonically.

Or Edward Martin.

Or both.





CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

The sun sinks swiftly behind the skyline of buildings and a colorless twilight—the most dangerous time of the day—nestles over the city like a stifling cloak. It is the edge of night. Literally. For twenty-five years a daytime serial called *The Edge of Night* has been entertaining mystery audiences, and this year it will win a special award—“celebrating a quarter century of murder”—from the Mystery Writers of America at the annual Edgar Allen Poe Awards festivities.

Actually, it is the show's second Edgar, for chief writer Henry Slesar is an acknowledged master of the whodunit form and has kept the series consistently mysterious. *Edge* was given an Edgar in 1974, and in 1960 Slesar won the award in the Best First Mystery Novel category. While daytime dramas often flirt with suspense and indulge in mystery plots, *The Edge of Night* is unique in that its emphasis is totally in our genre. One-third of all the murders committed on daytime television occur on this program and since its beginning the show has never been without a whodunit or whydunit story line, garnished with the bizarre.

The setting for *Edge*'s more than two decades of crime is the mythical midwestern city called Monticello, patterned somewhat after Cincinnati (the home, actually, of Procter and Gamble, the soap company which produces and sponsors the show). Indeed, for years the buildings behind the opening titles—slipping from twilight into darkness—were that city's

very interesting skyline. The show has been built around a character named Mike Karr, originally a detective but now a lawyer. Interestingly, the very first Mike Karr was played by John Larkin, an actor who for many years was identified with the role of Perry Mason on radio. For twenty-five years Karr has been caught in an endless web of murder, following strand after interwoven strand. Some of his more recent cases deserve comment.

Kim Hunter portrayed a murderess on the show for many months last year. Her role was that of a famous actress making a movie in which she is to play a grotesque witch. (The celebrated makeup artist Dick Smith, who created all the incredible transformations in the film *Altered States*, masterminded her disguise.) At the same time she learns she is losing her husband to a younger woman, and determined to strike out against her rival, she uses her newly learned makeup techniques to create another identity for herself. Before she is unmasked she manages to kill four people.

"She's now in an asylum," Kim laughingly told COS recently, referring to the fate of her character—and her final scene, as Karr closes in on her, is a triumph of madness.

The audience knew from the beginning of Kim's murderous plans, but the story that followed was a true whodunit. A string of deaths occurs in the vicinity of a nightclub called The Unicorn, where a troubled young puppeteer with a history of violence is performing. All the killings involve a blood-stained puppet named Koko the Clown. The mystery was so complex, Slesar relates, that when after many months the surprise killer was revealed, the show scheduled three days of flashbacks to inform the audience that if they'd watched carefully they would have seen the killer was present at all of the murders and had both motivation and opportunity.

Currently the major action of *Edge* is happening within the confines of the private sanitorium of a villainous plastic surgeon. When the bandages come off at the finish of *this* story, Slesar promises another shock surprise. It's worth staying around for. *The Edge of Night* truly deserves its special MWA award.

Another special Edgar is being given the PBS *Mystery!* series which made its debut last year, and COS has also acclaimed this anthology of distinguished British mystery television, from Rumpole of the Bailey to the Dick Francis racing stories. Francis recently told COS that he has been very proud of the TV adaptations of his stories, especially Mike

Gwilym's to-the-life portrayal of hero Sid Halley and the realism of the tracks. (He noted drily that when *Dead Cert* was made into a feature some years back by other hands they "changed the story terribly.") Now he has high hopes of developing a television series featuring an American Olympic athlete who becomes involved in sporting mysteries all over the world. "It's a bit early on," comments Francis, but the concept certainly sounds as if it has a chance.

Meantime, the *Mystery!* series, among other delights, is showcasing more of Peter Lovesey's Sergeant Cribb adventures, which if anything are even better than last year's batch. Once more the redoubtable Cribb, gunless, bowler in hand, tackles another caseload of Victorian crime. *Waxwork* is set in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, the same eerie display today as it was in Cribb's time, and it was actually filmed there—a very creepy experience for the crew. ("Those glass eyes sort of follow you around.") Lovesey devours old newspapers of the period for his plots. ("The scandals, fads, and fancies that obsessed Victorian England seem fertile ground for mysteries.") Among the problems he invents for Cribb this season are a headless body fished out of the Thames, a clairvoyant who seems to be spiriting away valuable paintings, a marriage-for-profit scheme, and much mayhem at the venerable Charing Cross Hospital. By all means, catch Cribb, part of the reason why *Mystery!* has earned its spécial honor.

Among the American television series nominated for Edgars is *Magnum P. I.*, a detective series set in the Hawaiian Islands. Crime shows with a Hawaii locale are far from novel, but the bounce and freshness of this show has made it popular enough to be renewed for next season. Tom Magnum, a Vietnam veteran in Naval Intelligence, has settled into post-war private investigation work, operating out of the guest house of the Waikiki estate of famed pulp novelist Robin Masters. (Neither Magnum nor the audience ever sees Masters, but the voice of the writer is supplied by Orson Welles.) Rather than mere surfboard high adventure, the show has presented some serious mysteries with interesting endings.

A *Quincy* episode is also an Edgar contender, a program called "A Matter of Principle," in which a dental-bite pattern is used to capture a suspected rapist. The series has featured some intelligent though somewhat preachy scripts and already won an Edgar a few years back. *Tenspeed and Brown Shoe*, a series about an engaging pair of private detectives which unfortunately had a brief run, was also nominated.

In the made-for-television-features category, there are three contenders. *City in Fear*, David Janssen's last TV performance, presented him as a feisty reporter who created a citywide frenzy when he tried to whip up circulation for a dying newspaper by writing about "the dream-girl killer." *The Revenge of the Stepford Wives* took Ira Levin's suburban automaton's one step further: the Stepford husbands must at any cost silence the young reporter (Sharon Glass) who stumbled upon this New England town where wives were programmed to be subservient. *The Last Song* had Lynda Carter avenge her husband's murder when he uncovered evidence of the illegal dumping of chemical waste which could jeopardize a whole town.

Interesting television mysteries which didn't make the nominations were *The Memory of Eva Ryker*, a somewhat ponderous thriller about a death that reached across two generations; *S.H.E.*, featuring a heroine in James Bondlike role reversal; and *Nightkill*, a nifty Robert Mitchum chase whodunit which didn't make it because it was actually a theatrical feature shifted to television first. However, neither the nominations nor these runnersup were so distinguished as to make this an outstanding year for the mystery on television. May the best show win this time, but let's hope for better crime on screen next season.



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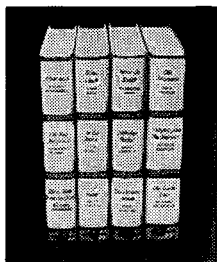
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